



The UIA Institute for the Rule of Law

STATEMENT

Paris, April 17, 2020

UIA-IROL EXPRESSES CONCERN ABOUT THE SITUATION OF LAWYERS AND HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN TANZANIA

The UIA-IROL continues to be gravely concerned about the judicial harassment perpetrated against human rights lawyer, Tito Magosi, and former President of the Tanganyika Law Society, Fatma Karume¹.

The UIA-IROL notes that with the October elections approaching, it is concerned that intimidation of human rights defenders critics of the Government will be extremely rampant.

It is a fact that Tanzania's human rights record continues to deteriorate. Even before the COVID-19 crisis, the Government had severely restricted media and critics of the authorities; deregistered civil society groups; arrested human rights defenders and journalists; and undermined the rights of women and of children².

In a statement issued on March 17, 2020, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights condemned "an ongoing strategy by the Government to use the criminal justice system to target its critics, imposing large fines or jail terms on opponents, journalists and civil society figures"³.

It appears from various indicators that, in the last several months, significant restrictions have been imposed on democratic and civil society.

Today, the UIA-IROL fears that the COVID-19 crisis may be used as a pretext to further limit rights and liberties beyond what is legitimate in emergency situations. The UIA-IROL is particularly concerned for the protection of lawyers and human rights defenders, who, in the ordinary course of their professional activities – especially in the context of defending human rights – often criticize government actions or question the status quo.⁴

Therefore, the UIA-IROL calls on the Tanzanian Government to refrain from any measure (including by way of judicial harassment) that infringes on the ability of lawyers and human rights defenders to defend the rights and liberties of citizens. Even where the government alleges bona fide violations of those measures, the rights to due process and a fair trial of all against whom such allegations are levied must be guaranteed.

¹See https://www.uianet.org/sites/default/files/uia-irol_pm_mocla_tanzania_20200327.pdf and https://www.uianet.org/sites/default/files/uia-irol_mocla_tanzania_20200410.pdf

² See Human Rights Watch's report "Tanzania- Events of 2019" <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/tanzania-and-zanzibar> and Amnesty International's report "Tanzania: Climate of fear, censorship as repression mounts," <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/10/tanzania-climate-of-fear-censorship-as-repression-mounts/>

³ UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner: "Tanzania: Opposition sentences highlight continued stifling of freedoms", <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25724&LangID=E>

⁴ See Statement by the Legal and Human Rights Center, <https://www.humanrights.or.tz/posts/b/News/protection-of-human-rights-during-the-outbreak-of-coronavirus-covid-19>; see also the Communication Regulatory Authority (TCRA) penalizing three TV stations for airing content that was "misleading and untrue" about the government's strategy on fighting coronavirus, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52214740>

In sum, the UIA-IROL urges the Tanzanian Government to refrain from using emergency measures as a pretextual weapon against lawyers and human rights defenders who act in defense of citizens' rights.

More about the UIA-IROL

The Institute for the Rule of Law of the International Association of Lawyers (UIA-IROL) promotes the Rule of Law and supports and defends, in particular, (1) lawyers, judges and human rights defenders who are harassed, threatened and/or persecuted in the exercise of their professions, (2) the independence of the legal and judicial professions, and (3) the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, especially in defense of human rights.

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