*Emmerson D. Mnangagwa*

*President of the Republic of Zimbabwe*

*Munhumutapa Building Samora Machel*

*P Bag 7700, Causeway*

*Harare*

*Zimbabwe*

 Juli 2023

**Benjamin Watadza, Emmanuel Chitima, Comfort Mpofu, Lionel Madamombe, Gamuchirai Chaburumunda and Darlington Chigwena**

Your Excellency Mr. Emmerson Mnangagwa,

I am concerned about the continued imprisonment of five University of Zimbabwe students Benjamin Watadza (24), Emmanuel Chitima (24), Comfort Mpofu (22), Lionel Madamombe (24) and Darlington Chigwena. A sixth student, Gamuchirai Chaburumunda was granted bail on 4 July by the High Court of Zimbabwe. The six students were arrested separately on 17, 23 May and 8 June following a peaceful protest on 15 May in Harare, Zimbabwe’s capital, calling for an end to the persecution of opposition leaders and the release of Citizens’ Coalition for Change (CCC) MP, Job Sikhala. The students were charged with “malicious damage to property”, only on the basis that the same calls they made during their peaceful protest were found illegally spray painted on government buildings the following day. There is no evidence linking the students to the paintings.

They have been detained in Harare Central prison since their arrest and their request for bail has been refused, with the authorities unreasonably arguing that they are ‘capable of causing more trouble for the State’. Their detention has resulted in the students missing their exams as the University of Zimbabwe refused to work with the correctional services to arrange for them to sit for “special exams” citing that these are only allowed in extraordinary circumstances such as illness and bereavement.

The Zimbabwe government has a disturbing history of arresting protestors and violently dispersing peaceful protests, in violation of the right to peaceful protest which is provided for under Section 58 and section 59 of the 2013 Constitution of Zimbabwe and Article 21 of the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), of which Zimbabwe is state party.

I urge you to drop all charges against the six students and immediately release Benjamin Watadza, Emmanuel Chitima, Comfort Mpofu, Lionel Madamombe, Gamuchirai Chaburumunda and Darlington Chigwena. I also call on you to stop the clampdown on dissent and respect the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, as provided for in the Constitution of Zimbabwe.

Yours sincerely,

CC: Botschaft der Republik Simbabwe Dannenwalder Weg 91 13439 Berlin