

**WORKERS'**



**DEFENCE**

**BULLETIN**



***DEFEND SHEILA  
CHISIRIMUNHU !!***

***DEFEND OUR  
TEACHERS !!***

***DEFEND OUR  
EDUCATION  
SYSTEM !!***

**AN INJURY TO ONE  
IS  
AN INJURY TO ALL**



**The Nation of Zimbabwe was shocked when in December 2020 the news was heard of the imprisonment of a 53 year-old primary school teacher for peacefully demonstrating for payment of her salary, a salary which the Zimbabwe government had signed a written contract to pay. Comrade Sheila has been released on bail awaiting appeal without solidarity she may return to prison.**

**This is her story and the story of the Zimbabwe teachers' struggle together with solidarity messages.**



**TEACHERS DEMONSTRATE FOR PAYMENT OF THEIR SALARIES. AT MUCHEKE EDUCATION OFFICES, MASVINGO URBAN. COMRADE SHEILA IS ON THE RIGHT OF THE PICTURE, FINGER RAISED.**

## SHEILA'S STORY IN HER OWN WORDS



I am a 53 year-old single mother of four daughters, two biological and twin foster children.

I have been working as a teacher for 28 years.

I became an activist in Masvingo Central in the late 1990s. This decision was driven by the injustices which I saw in the workplace including gender inequality. It has always been my wish to see the worker being emancipated.

I grew up in a family of six and was raised by an educator, my father, a headmaster, who was able to afford to give us an upbringing which in the standards of those days could be termed a 'good life'. We were the envy of our community. I was motivated to become a teacher.

In those days, teaching was a respected profession and teachers earned a living salary. Now we are a laughing stock. It pains me to see how our profession has been degraded.

The problems that I have met as a teacher have driven me to become an active trade unionist, not only because of the necessity of earning enough to live on, but also because of wanting to restore the dignity of the teaching profession in Zimbabwe.

As a trade union activist, I was formerly Provincial Secretary for the Progressive Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ). I was also District Secretary of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) from 1999-2013. I also worked with the Christian Alliance in Masvingo Province, co-ordinating the work of pastors.

Currently I am the Gender Secretary for the Amalgamated Rural Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe (ARTUZ) in Masvingo Province.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2020, ARTUZ organised a peaceful protest for the restoration of our US\$ 520 salary which has been cut to a paltry US\$ 30 dollars as we are now being paid RTGS\$ 520. The protest was done in compliance with the COVID-19 regulations — social distancing was maintained, hands were sanitized and people wore masks.

It was in the process of demonstrating peacefully that I was arrested and assaulted by a police officer. and had my hands handcuffed behind my back.

I was then held at Chikato Police Station. I am asthmatic and I was denied access to my inhaler and my medication. In the evening, my lawyer came and demanded that I gain access to my inhaler and my medication. The police maintained that they had no fuel to transport me. Eventually my lawyer accompanied me in the presence of two detectives.

The following day I was granted bail.

On 18<sup>th</sup> December 2020 I attended court where magistrate Mbonisi Ndhlovu sentenced me to 16 months imprisonment of which 6 months were suspended and 10 months were effective.

The charge under which I was convicted, was:

**“participating in a gathering with intent to promote public violence, breaches of the peace or bigotry as defined in section 37 of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act”**

I was taken to Mutimerufu Prison where I stayed for 16 days, including the whole Christmas and New Year period when most people are together with their families. During my stay in prison, though I was not feeling well I was forced to work in the fields. The cells were tiny and dirty and the food was not fit for human consumption. I lost 13 kg in weight.

An appeal was lodged by my lawyer on both conviction and sentence and on 5<sup>th</sup> January 2021, Justice Wamambo released me on bail of RTGS\$ 2,000 pending my appeal.

My appeal will be heard in Masvingo High Court for which a date has not yet been set. **I may still go to prison.**



**SHEILA CHISIRIMUNHU WITH ARTUZ PRESIDENT OBERT MASARAURE (IN RED SHIRT) AND LAWYER**



# **UNDERSTANDING THE ZIMBABWE TEACHERS' SALARY CRISIS**

**by Obert Masaraure ARTUZ President**

Many people outside of Zimbabwe have been puzzled why Zimbabwean teachers and others in government service have been demanding pay in United Dollars. This article is an attempt to unpack the root cause of the salary crisis and address frequently asked questions.

The Amalgamated Rural Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (ARTUZ) has been on the forefront of demanding “the restoration of the value of our salaries.” Teachers have staged multiple protests. In December 2018 following the ARTUZ Conference in Mutare on Zimbabwe’s eastern border, teachers staged a 278 km march from Mutare to the capital Harare. In January 2019, this was followed with a ‘Salary Camp’ outside the Ministry of Finance in Harare. More recently, in June 2020, a peaceful demonstration was held in Masvingo in the south-east of Zimbabwe. At that demonstration an ARTUZ member, Sheila Chisirimunhu, was arrested and brutalized. In December she was convicted and sentenced to 10 months in prison. For the time being she is free on bail pending appeal.

How did this problem start?

Extreme hyper-inflation started in 2001 and accelerated massively in 2008 causing the government to issue currency in values of trillions of Zimbabwe dollars (in 2000 the highest denomination note was Z\$ 100). 2008 was also an election year and following disputes and negotiations a Government of National Unity (GNU) was formed in February 2009.

One of the first acts of the GNU was to scrap the Zimbabwe dollar and institute a multi-currency regime in which the US Dollar became the currency of reference.

In 2012, the government and the employees held salary negotiations. The salaries were negotiated in United States Dollars under the multi-currency system. The minimum salary of a teacher was pegged at US\$ 520 then. It was not enough to meet the basic needs of teachers but it was accepted for the sake of progress.

From 2013 to 2016 teachers were pushing for a salary raise but government insisted they could not afford to do that. Salaries then were below the average for the Southern African development Community (SADC) average of around US\$ 600.

Teachers and other civil servants patriotically served hoping that the employer would one day raise their salaries.

On 28<sup>th</sup> November 2016, the government of Zimbabwe introduced the so-called ‘Bond Notes’ under the guise that it was an export incentive. Bond notes were made legal tender when then President Mugabe used his Presidential powers to amend the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe Act designating Bond Notes as legal tender equivalent to the US Dollar.

Teachers were then paid in the Bond Notes equivalent to their US Dollar salaries. Thus, a teacher would at that time be paid 520 Bond Notes per month.

Currency was not always physically available and citizens were encouraged to transact payments online by cellphone. Workers were by then receiving electronic money designated in US dollars but real US Dollars were rarely seen.

The real value of the Bond Note against the US Dollar fell both in the shops and on the Black Market until the Bond Note was worth only around 40% of the US Dollar while the Zimbabwe Government insisted that it was 1:1.

This was wage theft. Government had unilaterally varied a contract with employees.

In October 2018 the government began a process of currency reforms. Banks were ordered to separate Foreign Currency Accounts, FCAs from Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) accounts. Teachers who had previously held FCAs were forcibly moved to RTGS accounts. The salaries were now paid in RTGS Dollars.

On 20<sup>th</sup> February 2019 government finally dropped the 1:1 fiction through a Monetary Policy Statement. But teachers' salaries were not adjusted to the new, liberalised exchange rate.

One would have expected government to simply pay the minimum salary of US\$ 520 in the actual **equivalent** of RTGS Dollars. Government refused to adjust salaries but allowed 'market forces' to dictate prices of goods and services. By mid-2020, teachers' wages dropped in real terms to around US\$ 30 per month or South African Rand R450 per month.

The theft which had been hidden behind the 1:1 exchange rate then became apparent. This prompted teachers to demand their pre-October 2018 salaries. Government then called for fresh negotiations after violating a standing agreement.

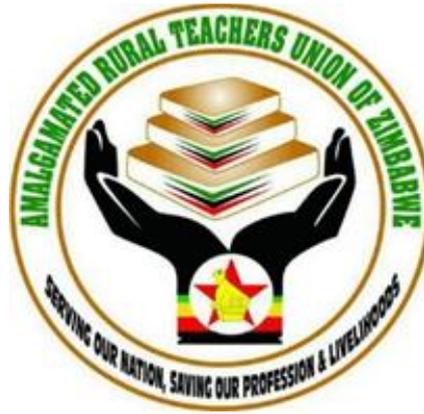
Goods and services are currently being sold in US Dollars but teachers still earn the volatile local currency. In October and November 2020 the government raised salaries to RTGS\$ 17000 which includes a COVID-19 allowance. In real terms, teachers are now earning US\$ 155 per month or South African Rand R2,290

Government's move was a serious assault on the doctrine of freedom and sanctity of contract. A standing contract was trashed by employer.

Today teachers earn poverty wages after the wage theft achieved through currency 'reform'. A teacher earns a salary of an equivalent of around USD 155 monthly including COVID19 allowance. This is just a fraction of the USD 520 produced from salary negotiations. Teachers are living in poverty, they cannot buy decent clothes, and they cannot afford basic meals, shelter, healthcare, education and other basics. They are incapacitated.

We call upon citizens of the world to support our struggle for the restoration of our robbed salaries. This is in the best interest of our education which has taken a big knock because of teacher incapacitation.

**Aluta Continua !!**



## STATEMENTS BY ARTUZ

### 21<sup>st</sup> DECEMBER 2020

ARTUZ Masvingo Provincial Secretary for Gender and Welfare Cde Sheila Chisirimunhu has been sentenced to 16 months with 6 months suspended. She is going to serve an effective 10 months in prison. Cde Chisirimunhu was convicted of charges of participating in a gathering with the intention to cause public violence on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2020 at Mucheke District Education Offices Masvingo.

The verdict passed by the Masvingo Magistrate Mbonisi Ndlovu proves that the Zimbabwean judiciary system is compromised. The outcome of Cde Sheila's court case came at a juncture when there is abuse of law against female activists.

We continue to observe the widening of the legislative gap between the constitution of the land and the existing operative laws in the public sector. Its only in Zimbabwe where we have magistrates who do not honour the constitution, with reference to **Sections 59** and **65** of the **Constitution of the Republic of Zimbabwe**. The Constitution clearly give emphasis on the rights of employees to take part in collective job action, the rights to demonstrate and petition. The court ruling has blatantly violated **Sections 59** and **65**.

There is need for the realignment of the judiciary to henceforth avoid the victimization of activists particularly our female Cde Sheila Chisirimunhu. It is a pity that on top of the poor remuneration that teachers are earning, the judicial system has manifested its diabolic traits on Cde Sheila.

A notice of appeal has been submitted to the court.

We condemn the travesty of a court ruling on Cde Sheila's case, on this note we cordially urge fellow citizens to join hands and form a front that will take action to realign the judicial system of our motherland. The fight has only just begun. We will not rest until Cde Chisirimunhu is free. Convictions and all other forms of oppression are not the correct solution to deal with poor teachers' salaries and the collapsing education system.

## 5<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2021

ARTUZ veteran trade unionist Cde Sheila Chisirimunhu was granted RTGS 2000 bail today at Masvingo High Court. Cde Chisirimunhu spent 18 days at Mutimurefu Prison after she was unlawfully convicted by Magistrates Mbonisi Ndlovu at Masvingo Magistrates Court.

We are still demanding total freedom of Cde Sheila Chisirimunhu. Her conviction on 18<sup>th</sup> December 2020 proved how our judiciary system is compromised.

We continue to thank all citizens and organizations who gave unconditional solidarity to Cde Chisirimunhu during her time of persecution at Mutimurefu Prison.

We are glad Cde Chisirimunhu reappeared stronger and read to continue leading the struggle of workers freedom.

**Long Live! Cde Chisirimunhu, Long Live!**

**ARTUZ INFORMATION DEPARTMENT**



**ARTUZ SALARY CARAVAN DECEMBER 2018: MUTARE TO HARARE**



## **HIGH COURT ENDS TEACHER'S 18-DAY DETENTION OVER POOR SALARY PROTEST**

5<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2021

High Court Judge Justice Neville Wamambo on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> January 2021 ended the 18-day detention of Amalgamated Rural Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (ARTUZ) leader and Masvingo teacher Sheila Chisirimunhu, who had been sentenced to serve 16 months in prison after she was convicted for participating in a protest demanding improved salaries and working conditions for teachers.

The 53 year-old Chisirimunhu, who is a widow, and is represented by Martin Mureri of Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights, petitioned the Masvingo High Court on 31 December 2020 seeking to be admitted on bail pending the determination and outcome of her appeal against both conviction and sentence. The ARTUZ leader was sentenced to serve 16 months in prison after she was convicted on 18<sup>th</sup> December 2020 by Masvingo Magistrate Mbonisi Ndlovu and found guilty of participating in a gathering with intent to promote public violence, breaches of the peace or bigotry as defined in section 37 of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act. She was arrested in June 2020 together with Obert Masaraure, the ARTUZ President, after they allegedly participated in a demonstration held in Masvingo, where teachers protested against poor salaries and unfavourable working conditions and demanded to be paid a monthly salary amounting to US\$ 520.

Her appeal against both conviction and sentence, which was filed by Mureri at Masvingo High Court is yet to be set down for hearing.

While Chisirimunhu was jailed, Masaraure, who had also been on trial facing the same charges of participating in a gathering with intent to promote public violence, breaches of the peace or bigotry as defined in section 37 of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act, was acquitted by Magistrate Ndlovu.

On Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> January 2021, Justice Wamambo ordered Chisirimunhu to pay bail amounting to RTGS\$ 2,000 and to report at Chesvingo Police Station in Masvingo once every last

Justice Wamambo also ordered Chisirimunhu to continue residing at her given residential address until the finalisation of her appeal lodged at Masvingo High Court against both conviction and sentence.

**by Kumbirai Mapfunda for  
ZIMBABWE LAWYERS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**



## **ZCTU SOLIDARITY MESSAGE**

23<sup>rd</sup> DECEMBER 2020

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) has learnt with utter shock and disbelief of the sentencing of a trade unionist, Sheila Chisirimunhu to 16 months imprisonment for protesting against underpayment.

Circumstances are that Sheila Chisirimunhu, a member of the Amalgamated Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe (ARTUZ) on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2020 joined other teachers in Masvingo to protest against underpayment. They were clearly less than 50, observing all COVID-19 regulations and were peaceful. The Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) disrupted the protest and all protestors fled. She was the only one arrested.

The court has now convicted her for holding a placard saying "USD salaries now" for allegedly public violence.

The ZCTU believes this is a miscarriage of justice and an attack on the workers' Constitutional right to demonstrate and petition. This is an attempt to silence and scare workers against participation in any future demonstrations.

This is a sad day in the history of trade unions. The ZCTU will do whatever is possible to support Sheila Chisirimunhu and ARTUZ in this darkest hour.

**S. Mutindindi**  
**Acting Secretary General**



## **Zimbabwe Communist Party**

# **STATEMENT ON THE IMPRISONMENT OF COMRADE SHEILA CHISIRIMUNHU FOR PEACEFULLY DEMONSTRATING**

22<sup>nd</sup> DECEMBER 2020

## **HANDS OFF OUR TRADE UNIONS !! HANDS OFF THE WORKING CLASS !!**

53 year-old primary school teacher Comrade Sheila Chisirimunhu has been given 10 months imprisonment for taking part in a peaceful demonstration in Masvingo, Zimbabwe organised by the Amalgamated Rural Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe (ARTUZ), Comrade Sheila is ARTUZ Masvingo Provincial Secretary for Gender and Social Welfare.

She was arrested for carrying a placard saying "USD Salaries Now!" This was interpreted by the magistrate, Mr Mbonisi Ndhlovu as "public violence".

At the time of her arrest, Comrade Shilla was severely assaulted by Zimbabwe Republic Police female Constable Chabaya.

Teachers in Zimbabwe are demanding to be paid in US dollars as their original agreement stated. They are instead being paid the same amount in Zimbabwean RTGS dollars and in real terms their salaries are now around US\$35 or South African R650 per month.

The Zimbabwe Communist Party demands the immediate release of Comrade Sheila Chisirimunhu, the arrest of Constable Chabaya on assault charges and the disbarment of Magistrate Mbonisi Ndhlovu.

We further demand that the Zimbabwe government pays a living salary to the teachers of Zimbabwe and other government employees.

The ZCP calls on all trade unionists and progressive organisations to show solidarity with Comrade Sheila and ARTUZ.

**AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL !!**  
**ISSUED BY THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE ZCP**

# INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

*Messages received so far. We invite trade unions and progressive organisations to add to our solidarity campaign. Please check contact information at the end of this WORKERS' DEFENCE BULLETIN.*

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## **WORLD FEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS**

**Class oriented – uniting – democratic – modern – independent - internationalist**

### **ZIMBABWE: FREEDOM FOR SHEILA CHISIRIMUNHU OF THE ARTUZ TRADE UNION!**

23<sup>rd</sup> DECEMBER 2020

The World Federation of Trade Unions, representing 105 million workers who live and struggle on the five continents, condemns the conviction of Sheila Chisirimunhu from the Amalgamated Rural Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe, because she protested against salary cut of teachers from USD 500 to USD 30 per month. Sheila is a primary school teacher who has served for thirty years.

During the protest she was arrested and charged with public violence and sentenced to 16 months in prison.

The world's class-oriented trade union movement, firmly condemns such acts of repression, terrorism and non-respect of democratic and trade union liberties. We demand the immediate withdrawal of the sentence of our sister Sheila, we demand her freedom!

The criminalization of trade unions struggles must not pass. The teachers, workers and people of Zimbabwe are facing poverty and unemployment and have no other way out than the collective struggles of the working class. The WFTU is staunchly by their side for the fulfillment of their just demands.

**THE SECRETARIAT, WFTU**



**SOUTH AFRICAN COMMUNIST PARTY**

## **SOLIDARITY WITH SHEILA CHISIRIMUNHU IN ZIMBABWE**

*Part of a longer statement issued by the SACP 2<sup>nd</sup> MARCH 2021*

The Zimbabwean people were shocked in December 2020 when the news broke of the imprisonment of Sheila Chisirimunhu, a 53-year-old primary school teacher for peacefully demonstrating for payment of her salary which the Zimbabwe government had signed a written contract to pay. The SACP expresses its message of Solidarity with Sheila, who has been released on bail awaiting an appeal. Without solidarity, Sheila may return to prison for her just struggle.

The SACP has been and continues to be very clear that governments cannot renege on wage agreements or the payment of what is due to public servants, whether their unions are in South Africa or in any other countries. This is one reason the SACP has thrown its weight behind the South African public servants just campaign for the government to honour its wage adjustment agreements it has entered with their unions

**ISSUED BY THE SOUTH AFRICAN COMMUNIST PARTY**



**COMMUNIST PARTY OF GREECE**

**MESSAGE REGARDING THE  
TEACHERS' STRUGGLE IN ZIMBABWE**

23<sup>rd</sup> DECEMBER 2020

Dear Comrades,

The Communist Party of Greece (KKE) expresses its strong protest against the repression of the teachers' mobilizations and the savage detention of Sheila Chisirimhunu and extends its solidarity to the teachers, workers and people of Zimbabwe that struggle for their rights.

We demand from the country's authorities the immediate release of the detained trade-unionist, the dropping of the unacceptable charges against her and the implementation of the just demands of the teachers for decent salaries and working rights.

**INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS SECTION  
CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF GREECE**



**LEAGUE OF YOUNG COMMUNISTS USA**

**STATEMENT ON THE IMPRISONMENT OF  
COMRADE SHEILA CHISIRIMUNHU**

23<sup>rd</sup> DECEMBER 2020

Dear Comrades of the ZCP,

The LYC joins the ZCP in condemning the unjust imprisonment of Comrade Sheila and equally demands her immediate release. The cowardly use of the badge and force to break Comrade Sheila's commitment to the welfare of the people and fellow teachers is clear. The LYC recognizes this injustice as a clear-cut example of the little interest the rulers of the State have in developing education and strengthening the bargaining power of their workers.

In solidarity with ARUTZ and Comrade Sheila!

***“Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly”***  
**Martin Luther King Jr.**

**INTERNATIONAL DEPARTMENT OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE  
LEAGUE OF YOUNG COMMUNISTS USA**



## **SPTU CALLS FOR THE IMMEDIATE RELEASE OF COMRADE SHEILA CHISIRIMUNHU**

25<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 2020

The Somali Public Trade Union (SPTU) greatly regrets the detention of Comrade Sheila Chisirimunhu for taking part in a peaceful demonstration.

The police allegation was that Comrade Sheila was holding up a poster saying “USD Salaries Now” which cannot be taken as a criminal offence for which to be sentenced to 10 months imprisonment.

We see this as a human rights violation and a personal violation.

Therefore, SPTU again calls for the release of Comrade Sheila from imprisonment. It is illegal to arrest an innocent individual.

**We call for the release of Comrade Sheila Chisirimunhu.**

## ~ CONTACTS ~

We urge trade unions, progressive organisations and individuals to send letters of protest to the Zimbabwe government. We suggest that Comrades write to the Office of the President and then copy to the Ministries of Justice and Education.

Solidarity messages should go to the Amalgamated Rural Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe (ARTUZ).

### **ZIMBABWE GOVERNMENT:**

Office of the President: +263 242 707091/7 [info@opc.gov.zw](mailto:info@opc.gov.zw)

Ministry of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary: +263 242 774620/7 [justice@justice.gov.zw](mailto:justice@justice.gov.zw)

Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education: 263 242799914/704421/705153/705281/791127  
[admin@mopse.gov.zw](mailto:admin@mopse.gov.zw)

### **AMALGAMATED RURAL TEACHERS' UNION OF ZIMBABWE (ARTUZ):** [ruraltrsunion@gmail.com](mailto:ruraltrsunion@gmail.com)

Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights: [info@zlh.org.zw](mailto:info@zlh.org.zw)

Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU): **website currently infected**

Zimbabwe Communist Party (ZCP):

General Secretary: [ngqabuthomabhena@gmail.com](mailto:ngqabuthomabhena@gmail.com)

Secretary for Information and Publicity: [bomzmk@gmail.com](mailto:bomzmk@gmail.com)

Acting Secretary for International Affairs: [ipbeddowes@gmail.com](mailto:ipbeddowes@gmail.com)

### **INTERNATIONAL**

World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU): [info@wftucentral.org](mailto:info@wftucentral.org)

South African Communist Party (SACP): [info@sacp.org.za](mailto:info@sacp.org.za)

League of Young Communists USA (LYCUSA): [info@leagueofyoungcommunistsusa.org](mailto:info@leagueofyoungcommunistsusa.org)

Somali Public Trade Union (SPTU): [raxiin800@gmail.com](mailto:raxiin800@gmail.com)

