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# AIDS and Human Rights Groups Urge Zambian Government to Address Demands of Striking Health Workers and Stop Arresting Activists

By *moderator*

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The AIDS and Rights Alliance for Southern Africa (ARASA), a network of 20 organizations throughout the Southern African region working on HIV/AIDS and human rights, and the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) of South Africa, an internationally recognized leader in the fight for access to AIDS treatment, today urged Zambian President Levy Mwanawasa to address the demands of striking health workers for payment of outstanding housing allowances in order to bring an end to a two-week old strike of key medical staff across the country. "Health workers are at the front line in the struggle against HIV/AIDS. The Zambian government must honour its commitment made to health workers," said Zackie Achmat, the Chairperson of the TAC. The human resource crisis in the health sector in Southern Africa is leading to premature death and illness for millions of people in the region. While addressing the shortages of doctors, nurses and other key health professionals in Southern Africa is a critical part of dealing with the crisis, ensuring that the men and women now working in health systems in the region are fairly remunerated for their important work is vital to retaining personnel and lifting morale among staff.

ARASA and TAC also condemned Zambian police for the arrest of Clementine Mumba and Paul Kasonkomona of the Treatment Literacy and Advocacy Campaign (TALC), after they demonstrated in front of the Zambian parliament in solidarity with health workers and to raise awareness of their plight. "The right to free expression and public assembly are fundamental human rights in democracies the fact that Ms. Mumba and Mr. Kasonkomona, both people living with HIV/AIDS, were arrested for simply speaking out about a key health issue facing all Zambians is unacceptable and needs a full investigation by Zambian authorities," said Michaela Clayton, Director of ARASA. ARASA and TAC commend Ms. Mumba and Mr. Kasonkomona for their bravery and courage in attempting to alert the public about the impact of the current strike and the unfair treatment of health workers in Zambia.

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