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Zimbabwe: Charges Against Judge Blackie Dropped

The International Commission of Jurists' Centre for the Independence of Judges and Lawyers (ICJ/CIJL) welcomed the Prosecution's decision to withdraw charges against Fergus Blackie, a retired Zimbabwean judge accused of corruption and obstructing the due administration of justice. Former Judge Blackie was arrested in September 2002, two months after his retirement, and spent three nights in prison.

The former judge was facing charges after he acquitted a white woman accused of theft and sentenced the Justice Minister, Patrick Chinamasa, to a three-month term of imprisonment for contempt of court. According to various national and international observers, the charges against Blackie, who is white, were politically and racially motivated. He was also seen as being too "independent".

"The ICJ/CIJL hopes this decision will be the beginning of full respect for human rights and the rule of law in Zimbabwe", said Linda Besharaty-Movaed, Legal Advisor of the CIJL. "We believe this is just a small step in the right direction, however, more changes are needed. With the ongoing trials of Morgan Tsvangirai, the leader of the opposition party, who is accused of treason, and Judge Paradza, who is charged with corruption, the eyes of the international community will more than ever be on Zimbabwe".

The ICJ/CIJL sent a trial observer to monitor the trial of former Judge Blackie, however, charges were withdrawn prior to the hearing. The ICJ/CIJL is also monitoring the trials of Morgan Tsvangirai and Judge Paradza.

For further information, please contact: Linda Besharaty-Movaed, Legal Advisor, at +41 22 979 3809.

The ICJ is an international non-governmental organisation comprising sixty of the world's most eminent jurists and has a worldwide network of national sections and affiliated organisations

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