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UNITED NATIONS WATCH

His Excellency
António Guterres
Secretary-General
United Nations
New York

20 February 2025

Your Excellency,

I write on behalf of the 30 non-governmental organizations that comprise the Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy coalition, whose 18th annual summit was convened on 17 February 2026 at the United Nations Office at Geneva.

During the opening session, Mr. Blessed Mhlanga, a Zimbabwean journalist, delivered testimony concerning repression, restrictions on fundamental freedoms, and the shrinking space for independent media in Zimbabwe. His remarks were made peacefully and in good faith, in the exercise of his right to cooperate with the United Nations.

On 19 February 2026, the state-owned newspaper *The Herald* published an article titled "[Government condemns false, malicious Geneva claims.](#)" The article quoted Dr. Zhemu Soda, Zimbabwe's Minister of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services, who described Mr. Mhlanga's testimony as "malicious" and "false," and asserted that the Geneva platform had been misused "to peddle a distorted narrative." Minister Soda invoked provisions of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Amendment Act's so-called "patriotic clauses," stating that they were enacted to "protect national sovereignty." He warned that the law "unequivocally prohibits engaging with foreign entities to subvert, upset, overthrow, or overturn the constitutional Government of Zimbabwe," and suggested that those who "scurry to foreign lands to malign their own nation" would no longer escape legal consequences.

In addition, Senator Sengezo Tshabangu, publicly [stated](#) that he would pursue a parliamentary motion to cancel Mr. Mhlanga's passport on grounds of alleged "unpatriotic conduct." This is a concrete threat affecting Mr. Mhlanga's liberty and freedom of movement. Threats of passport revocation or travel restrictions directly implicate Article 12 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Zimbabwe is a State Party, guaranteeing the right to leave any country, including one's own.

When such threats are made in response to cooperation with the United Nations, they constitute intimidation and potential reprisal within the meaning of Human Rights Council resolution 12/2 and subsequent resolutions. Taken together, the public invocation of criminal liability under the “patriotic clauses,” coupled with calls for passport cancellation and investigation, constitute a serious and credible threat of reprisal against an individual for exercising his right to address the United Nations.

As you have consistently affirmed, individuals and civil society actors must be able to engage with the United Nations free from intimidation, harassment, prosecution, or restrictions on movement. Your annual report on cooperation with the United Nations in the field of human rights serves as a vital safeguard to document and address such cases.

On behalf of the Geneva Summit coalition, we respectfully request that:

1. You speak out publicly to condemn this act of intimidation and reprisal;
2. This case be formally examined under the United Nations framework addressing intimidation and reprisals;
3. The Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights urgently engage with the Government of Zimbabwe to seek clarification and firm, written guarantees that Mr. Mhlanga will not face criminal investigation, prosecution, detention, passport revocation, or any other adverse action for his testimony;
4. The matter be included in your next report on reprisals; and
5. The United Nations publicly reaffirm that no individual should face threats, prosecution, or punishment for cooperating with or speaking before the Organization.

The credibility of the United Nations as a safe forum for victims, journalists, and human rights defenders depends on ensuring that those who testify are protected rather than targeted. Allowing threats of criminal prosecution or restrictions on freedom of movement to stand unaddressed would send a chilling signal to civil society actors worldwide.

We thank you for your urgent attention to this matter and remain ready to provide transcripts of Mr. Mhlanga’s remarks and copies of the relevant public statements.

Sincerely yours,



Hillel C. Neuer
Executive Director, United Nations Watch
On behalf of the Geneva Summit Coalition