

**Joint Statement by the Chairman of the General Council of the Bar
of England and Wales, the General Council of the Bar of South
Africa, the Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales
and the Commonwealth Lawyers Association**

TRAVEL BAN ON CRITICS OF ZIMBABWEAN GOVERNMENT

The signatories to this statement note with grave concern reports that the Zimbabwean Government is confiscating passports from or denying passports to its critics who seek to travel from Zimbabwe.

This follows an amendment to Section 22 of the Zimbabwean Constitution sought by the Government, apparently to allow it to restrict the freedom of movement and freedom of speech of Zimbabweans critical of its policies and practices. Freedom of speech within Zimbabwe has already been severely curtailed. Those who have reportedly been denied the right to travel from Zimbabwe include Beatrice Mtetwa, an active Zimbabwean human rights lawyer and recently winner of the International Press Freedom Award, and Zimbabwean newspaper publisher Trevor Ncube.

The Zimbabwean Government recently described Zimbabwe as “a democratic state which upholds the rule of law and all fundamental freedoms including human rights “*. If the reports of travel restrictions imposed by the Government upon its critics are true, then such measures would plainly be incompatible with that claim. We call upon the Zimbabwean government to honour its stated obligations to fundamental freedoms such as freedom of speech, which are vital to any democracy, and to rescind any travel restrictions.

* Statement of the Zimbabwean Government to the 38th Session of the African Commission of Human and Peoples’ Rights, Banjul, The Gambia, 21 November to 5 December 2005.