

Harare, Zimbabwe, September 17 (Infosplusgabon) - Zimbabwe's doctors from both the private and public sectors have withdrawn their services following the alleged abduction of Zimbabwe Hospital Doctors' Association (ZHDA) president, Peter Magombeyi, this past Saturday.

The withdrawal of services was contained in a letter sent to President Emmerson Mnangagwa's office on Monday morning by nearly a thousand doctors who closed off the streets leading to his offices in Harare's central business district.

However, the medical practitioners were stopped from reaching Mnangagwa's offices after the police barricaded the protesting doctors, preventing them from crossing the road to the President's office.

"The matter is addressed to the first citizen of the country, His Excellency, the President of Zimbabwe ED Mnangagwa from the senior doctors in all government institutions. We, the senior doctors, in the public health medical institutions met today 16 September 2019 at Parirenyatwa Hospital (largest state owned hospital in Harare)," reads part of the letter.

"We deliberated on the disappearance of our colleague, Dr Peter Magombeyi, which was reported to Budiriro police station RB Number 4085997. Dr Magombeyi's whereabouts remain

unknown and we are seriously concerned about his welfare we therefore demand his unconditional return to his family.

"In the meantime, we have withdrawn our services as from 0800 hours 16 September as medical practitioners from both public and private services."

According to ZHDA, the alleged abduction took place around 10pm on Saturday by three assailants suspected of being state security agents.

"The abduction was preceded by numerous anonymous threats made to Dr Magombeyi including, for example, a text message from 0786645911 which read "Usazoti I did not warn you. Ramba uchita nharo. Uchatorwa nechampupuri. We are getting close now" (Translation: Don't say I didn't warn you. Carry on with the way you are acting and you will be abducted. We are getting close.)" ZHDA said.

Magombeyi was last heard of after sending a text to a ZHDA WhatsApp group which read "Kidnapped by 3 men. Fam 0715320465" just before he went missing.

Magombeyi's abduction comes as the ZHDA has been in ongoing negotiations with the state about doctors' working conditions after they embarked on a strike early last week.

Currently, junior doctors earn about ZWL (Zimbabwe dollars)\$400 (US\$30) as basic salary and an "on-call allowance" of approximately ZWL\$1,000 (US\$75) a month.

Meanwhile, the monthly cost of living has soared to nearly US\$200 (ZWL\$2664).

“Dr Magombeyi is leading the current industrial action by government doctors and ZADHR (Zimbabwe Association of Doctors for Human Rights) believes his abduction is a result of his activities in defending the rights of health workers. Increased attacks on professionals are an impediment to international re-engagement as it casts a negative perception on the country,” ZADHR said.

Health minister Obidiah Moyo has since issued statement vowing to locate Magombeyi.

“We have been made aware of the reported disappearance of Dr Peter Magombeyi the Acting President of the Zimbabwe Hospital Doctors Association and our employee at Harare Hospital in the case of a reported kidnapping. As the Ministry of Health and Childcare, we are alarmed by this,” he said.

“I have therefore personally engaged the State Security agencies who have undertaken to deploy resources to look for Dr Magombeyi and they are seized with this matter with no stone left un-turned. As the Minister responsible, my Ministry is concerned about the welfare, safety and well-being of all its cadres.”

He said his ministry was taking this matter very seriously.

As of writing this article, a prayer vigil was being held at Parirenyatwa Hospital for Magombeyi.

The abduction of Magombeyi is the latest in a string of abductions of high profile people that have protested against government on the worsening state of political, social and economic affairs.

Since January to date, more than 50 civil society, labor, and opposition leaders have been abducted in Zimbabwe with no arrests being made.

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