

June 7, 2010

Honorable W. Stuart Symington
American Ambassador
#2657 Avenue de la Gendarmerie (Kacyiru)
Kigali, Rwanda

Dear Ambassador Symington:

We are deans of American law schools. As legal educators, we believe we have an obligation to nurture in our students the core values of the legal profession. These core values are threatened by the arrest in Rwanda of William Mitchell College of Law Professor Peter Erlinder. We are writing to respectfully request your assistance in ensuring his safety and release.

Prof. Erlinder was in Kigali to pursue a legal defense for Madame Victoire Ingabire Umuhiza, an opposition candidate for President of Rwanda. Previously, Prof. Erlinder represented Rwandans accused of conspiracy and genocide before the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Clearly, this work has not endeared him to the regime in Rwanda, which has arrested, interrogated, and imprisoned him for simply doing the work of the lawyer: advocating on behalf of his client.

The U.N. Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers state that lawyers “shall not be identified with their clients or their clients’ causes as a result of discharging their functions” and that “governments shall ensure that lawyers are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference.” These principles also provide that “lawyers like other citizens are entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association and assembly.”

Ambassador Symington, we respectfully ask that urge the government of Rwanda to abide by these principles, to refrain from harassment of lawyers practicing law consistent with their professional obligations, and to release Prof. Erlinder forthwith.

Very truly yours,

(Affiliations are listed for identification only and do not represent institutional endorsement.)

R. Alexander Acosta, Florida International University
William E. Adams, Jr., Western State University College of Law
John B. Attanasio, Dedman School of Law Southern Methodist University
Martin H. Belsky, University of Akron School of Law
Paul Schiff Berman, Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law, Arizona State University.
Douglas Blaze, University of Tennessee College of Law
Jeff Brand, University of San Francisco School of Law
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Doris DelTosto Brogan, Villanova University School of Law
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Judge John L. Carroll, Cumberland School of Law, Samford University
James Ming Chen, University of Louisville
Annette E. Clark, Seattle University School of Law
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Ken Gormley, Duquesne University School of Law
Stephen M. Griffin, Tulane Law School
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Jack A. Guttenberg, Capital University Law School
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Scott W. Howe, Chapman University School of Law
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Robert H. Jerry, II, Levin College of Law, University of Florida
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Bernard V. Keenan, Suffolk University Law School
Robert Klonoff, Lewis & Clark Law School
Don LeDuc, Thomas M. Cooley Law School
Donald M. Lewis, Hamline University School of Law
David A. Logan, Roger Williams University School of Law
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