

June 7, 2010

Honorable Hillary Clinton
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton:

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.”

Secretary Clinton, we respectfully ask that you 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.)

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