

Activist Pastor Charged With Anti-Government Plot

A Zimbabwean pastor at the center of a protest movement against President Robert Mugabe was charged on Thursday with plotting to overthrow the government and insulting the national flag after he called for demonstrations last year.

Evan Mawarire, who was arrested on Wednesday on his return to Zimbabwe from the United States, faced the same charges last July, but the magistrate court then freed the preacher because police did not follow proper procedure when arresting him.

A police statement seen by Reuters said Mawarire incited the public to “revolt against a constitutionally elected government” between July and December by circulating videos on social media urging people to demonstrate against Mugabe’s administration.

Mawarire was accused of organizing a protest against the 92-year-old Mugabe on Sept. 22 when the veteran leader was attending an annual meeting of the United Nations in New York.

His lawyer Harrison Nkomo said the 39-year-old pastor, who faces a 20-year jail term if convicted, was also slapped with a lesser serious charge of insulting Zimbabwe’s flag.

The charge emanated from an online video that he posted last year where he was draped in national colors lamenting the country’s economic and social decay.

Mawarire, whose #ThisFlag movement last year helped organize one of the biggest anti-government protests in the last decade, is expected to appear in court on Friday, said Nkomo.

Mugabe has held power in the former British colony since independence in 1980. He routinely accuses opponents of being

funded by Western powers to remove him from office. {eoa}

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