

COMMISSIONS WATCH

ZIMBABWE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

[26th March 2018]

Press Statement by the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission on the Doctors Strike



The Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) has taken note of and is concerned about the impasse between the Government of Zimbabwe and members of the Zimbabwe Hospital Doctors' Association (ZHDA) who have been on strike since the 1st of March 2018. The stalemate in negotiations has led to a prolonged job action by the doctors, leading to compromised health care. This in turn has led to serious suffering and pain by patients and unfortunate loss of lives in the country.

Section 76 (1) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe [\[link\]](#) clearly states that every citizen and permanent resident of Zimbabwe has the right to access basic healthcare services. The same Constitution in section 65 also protects labour rights including the right to engage in collective job action. The doctors have taken a position and are indeed exercising this right.

In light of the above, the ZHRC implores the Government of Zimbabwe through the Ministry of Health and Child Care and the Health Services Board (HSB) to engage the striking personnel to ensure that their grievances are resolved without compromising the right to health, the right to life and access to health care services at Government Hospitals. The Government and the HSB are also urged to ensure that the ongoing dialogue between both parties is conducted in good faith and in the interest of all parties concerned. The fact that this problem recurs almost on an annual basis suggests that previous engagements have not addressed the root cause of the problem.

The ZHRC recommends that the Government of Zimbabwe conforms to the Abuja Declaration [\[link\]](#) in which the Heads of State of African Union countries pledged to set a target of allocating at least 15% of their annual budget to improve the Health Sector. This would in no doubt go a long way in improving not only the conditions of service of health service personnel which has become an unresolved perennial issue, but also improve the general health delivery system.

The Commission notes with concern that due to the inadequate and poor facilities in most public health institutions, the leaders within the Government of Zimbabwe generally shun the services that are a product of their policies and decisions. Instead they seek treatment in private health facilities and even travel beyond Zimbabwean borders for health services.

This practice, in our view, displays a clear lack of confidence in the public health delivery system by our leaders and compromises commitment and resoluteness in ensuring the recovery of the system. Further, it relegates such services to the poor who have to contend with the deteriorating health standards, which fly in the face of the rights based approach to development. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs] to which the Zimbabwean Government has committed include targets to achieve good health and well-being for all. This cannot be achieved if the current challenges bedeviling the Zimbabwean health delivery system are not addressed with the urgency and seriousness that they deserve.

The ZHRC calls on the parties involved and relevant to the current impasse to expedite engagements and ensure an immediate and lasting solution, bearing in mind the agony of those who are sick in our midst. The Government of Zimbabwe in particular as the duty-bearer in the fulfilment and enjoyment of the right to health is encouraged to show leadership in the face of this national crisis, and ensure that the public health institutions are functional.

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