

COMMISSIONS WATCH 7/2017

ZIMBABWE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

[12th December 2017]

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY COMMEMORATIONS

The Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission hosted the International Human Rights Day Commemorations on Friday the 8th of December 2017. The event was held at Takashinga Cricket Club in Highfield. International Human Rights Day is celebrated each year on 10 December globally since 1948 when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted.



The Chairperson of the Commission, Mr Elasto Mugwadi delivered a speech during the ceremony.

Having acknowledge distinguished guests and welcomed all those present:

“It is an honour for me to deliver these remarks on behalf of the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) and on my own personal behalf at this very important occasion to celebrate the International Human Rights Day. Allow me to heartily acknowledge and welcome our newly appointed Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs, Honourable Ziyambi Ziyambi who is the Guest of Honour at this commemorative event. May I also acknowledge the presence amidst us, of Honourable Miriam Chikukwa, the Provincial Minister for Harare Metropolitan Province, as well as distinguished guests from the Diplomatic Corps, Development Partners, Government Ministries, Civil Society Organisations, Highfield community and other stakeholders represented at this important function.

International Human Rights Day is commemorated globally each year on the 10th of December since 1948, when the United Nations General Assembly recognised the importance of human rights through the adoption of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)** soon after the end of the Second World War. The atrocities committed during the Second World War included the massacre of about 6 million Jews, the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan, horrendous genocide involving prisoners of war, arial bombardment of civilians and mass rape of women and girls and all other kinds of horrific violations of human rights too ghastly to contemplate.

In 1950, the United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 423 (V), inviting all States and interested organizations to observe 10 December of each year as International Human Rights Day. This year’s International Human Rights Day commemoration is significant to all those who value human rights as it marks the beginning of year-long celebrations marking the 70th anniversary of the UDHR. Unfortunately, violations of the different rights recognised in the UDHR continue to be experienced worldwide that the need to promote, protect and enforce human rights is even greater than ever before.

This year’s commemorations are being held under the theme “**#StandUp4HumanRights**” which calls for all of us to stand up against human rights violations and abuses. As you may be aware,

the ZHRC is one of the Independent Commissions Supporting Democracy in Zimbabwe established in Chapter 12 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe. The general objectives of Independent Commissions include to support and entrench human rights and democracy, to protect the sovereignty and interests of the people, to promote constitutionalism, transparency and accountability and ensure injustices are remedied.

Building from the general objectives of Independent Commissions, it is important to note that the five Independent Commissions Supporting Democracy in Zimbabwe have peculiar functions that set them apart and define their individual character. In the case of the ZHRC these include but are not limited to the following: to promote awareness of and respect for human rights and freedoms at all levels of society; to monitor, assess and ensure observance of human rights and freedoms, to receive and consider complaints from the public and secure appropriate redress. The theme “**#StandUp4HumanRights**” therefore, sums up the mandate and work of the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission.

May I assure you our distinguished Guest of Honour, Honourable Minister, that the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission is committed and remains steadfast in executing its mandate and therefore has continued to make considerable progress towards becoming a very effective National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) as set out in the United Nations Paris Principles. The United Nations Paris Principles are the international human rights best practices which guide the establishment and operations of NHRIs. In fact, within a few years of operationalization, the ZHRC has already attained “A” Status accreditation with the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI), which the Commission achieved in May 2016. This means the ZHRC is in full compliance with the Paris Principles. This gives the ZHRC not only a voice but also voting rights at regional and international human rights fora. The Commission is also accredited by the International Ombudsman Institute and is affiliated to the Network of African Human Rights Institutions (NANHRI) and the African Commission of Human and People’s Rights (ACHPR).

The Commission continues to register a significant increase in the number of cases of human rights violations it is handling, including those requiring the Commission to conduct investigations. To date, since operationalization in June 2014, the Commission has received and dealt with about 1,489 complaints. The increase in cases being handled by the Commission is attributable to many factors including publicity of the Commission’s work in the media, road shows and outreaches in different parts of the country in line with the Commission’s mandate to promote awareness and respect for human rights at all levels of society. Some of the cases of human rights violations are referred from stakeholders some of whom have entered into memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with the Commission. Furthermore, the ZHRC in trying to enhance its efficiency and effectiveness in dealing with cases has successfully deployed an electronic case management system which will assist in the Commission’s speedy handling of cases.

It is worthy noting that in dealing with cases, the ZHRC has produced comprehensive reports on some of the investigations it has conducted. This year 2017, investigations were carried out in Mazoe, Bindura, Chegutu, Bikita and Rusape to address the issue of arbitrary and forced evictions and in Hurungwe West, Nyanga and Bikita on partisan food relief distribution and distribution of farming inputs. The recommendations to different stakeholders including to Government Ministries and support institutions seek to influence positive policy, law reform, behaviour change, promote administrative justice and foster a culture of human rights observance.

Furthermore, to date, the ZHRC has managed to successfully monitor twenty one (21) prisons out of the forty six prisons (46) we have in the country in line with its human rights monitoring function. This monitoring and inspections work has now been extended to cover children's homes, older persons' homes, Tongogara Refugee Camp, Mental Hospital Institutions such as Ingutsheni and Ngomahuru and by-elections conducted after the 2013 General elections. Resources permitting, the ZHRC would continue monitoring of Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) Centres country-wide. The Commission urges all citizens of Zimbabwe who are eighteen years and above, to register to vote. It is their inalienable right to elect leaders of their choice and free will.

The Commission therefore has great expectations that the ascendancy of His Excellency President Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa as the new head of state of the Republic of Zimbabwe will usher in a new dispensation focused on the promotion, protection and enforcement of human rights. In his inaugural speech at the National Sports Stadium on 24 November 2017, His Excellency President Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa assured the nation that pillars supporting democracy would be strengthened and respected and therefore, the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission is optimistic that all the impediments to the full enjoyment of rights and freedoms by the citizens will be equally addressed. The Commission applauds His Excellency's commitment to reviving the economy. Enjoyment of many of the socio-economic rights such as the right to education, health, food, shelter and many others has a direct correlation with the state of the economy. An improved and functional economy therefore increases the chances of citizens enjoying these rights fully.

The ZHRC also hopes for a speedy alignment of the various pieces of legislation to the Constitution, among them, the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission Act (Chapter 10:30) and the Zimbabwe Electoral Act. As the country moves towards the 2018 General Elections, the ZHRC calls upon the new political leadership to **StandUp4HumanRights** in earnest and urgently implement significant political reforms to restore and consolidate democracy in Zimbabwe characterised by all fundamental human rights and freedoms that include freedom of assembly and association, freedom to demonstrate and petition peacefully, freedom of expression and the media and freedom from arbitrary arrest and of course repealing of legislation such as the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) which have a negative bearing on the enjoyment of civil and political rights by the citizens. The ZHRC is heartened by His Excellency's commitment to dismantling of the previous political order that tolerated unaccountability, corruption, inefficiency, arbitrary decisions and non- commitment to the rule of law.

May I however, mention that despite the successes achieved so far, the Commission continues to experience considerable challenges relating to its full operationalization that hinder full execution of its mandate. These include an inadequate operational budget, limited reach and visibility due to non - decentralization to provinces and districts, lack of adequate tools of trade that include office space, computers, and vehicles and lack of enforcement mechanisms for recommendations from investigative and monitoring report outcomes. The Commission therefore continues to appeal to Government and Development Partners for more support, most critical being human resources. We need sufficient manpower to accomplish our mandate effectively.

Finally, let me take this opportunity to assure you that the ZHRC is ready to partner with all duty bearers and key stakeholders in Government, Civil Society, Local Authorities, Faith Based Organisations, Traditional Leadership, fellow Constitutional Commissions, among other key

institutions of society for the fulfilment, protection and enjoyment of human rights by all in Zimbabwe. Let us all Stand Up for Human Rights beginning here and now.

Note by Veritas: This statement can also be accessed on the ZHRC website and on the Veritas website [\[link\]](#)

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