



## **ZHRC STATEMENT FOLLOWING CYCLONE IDAI INDUCED DISASTER IN ZIMBAWE**

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The Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC/Commission) is greatly saddened by the unfolding natural disaster arising from the devastating effects of Cyclone Idai. The worst affected areas include Manicaland, Masvingo and Mashonaland East Provinces. Communities in Mozambique and Malawi were also ravaged by the cyclone, which is arguably one of the worst disasters to hit Southern Africa.

The ZHRC takes note that human life has been lost, with at least 100 deaths having been recorded to date and many more people still missing and feared dead in Zimbabwe. More than 300 bodies are suspected to have been swept away in the floods. The Commission expresses its deepest condolences to the bereaved families. The disaster has also caused injuries and suffering to a lot of people and the ZHRC wishes them a speedy recovery. Worse still, homes, household effects, and public infrastructure have been destroyed while sources of livelihoods have been ruined. Many of the survivors are likely to have lost birth certificates, national identity cards, passports and other essential documents necessary to access services and pursue opportunities in life. These sad developments have a serious negative impact on the human rights situation for affected families and communities.

The ZHRC also takes note of the efforts by the Government of Zimbabwe together with its partners and other stakeholders in responding to the victims' urgent relief requirements to mitigate against further loss of life and suffering. The Commission is encouraged by the commitment to restore normalcy and ensure the protection of human rights in a disaster situation in line with relevant national, regional and international standards. In

particular the ZHRC acknowledges the solidarity message by the Head of State, President Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa consoling the bereaved families and all affected people. The President also committed to mobilise resources to address the dire human rights situation and has in fact been directly participating in the rescue and recovery efforts. In the same vein ZHRC applauds the entire nation of Zimbabwe for coming together under these tragic circumstances and contributing to the much needed relief aid. Solidarity messages have also been outpouring from politicians, the corporate world, celebrities, artists, religious leaders, non-governmental organisations, embassies, development partners, and many other stakeholders and these are commendable.

This disaster has apparently been more vicious and devastating than had been anticipated by a number of key experts. Due to the effects of global warming, climate change and related circumstances, our country and indeed the Southern Africa region is likely to continue experiencing more natural disasters. The ZHRC therefore takes this opportunity to recommend the adoption of disaster risk reduction programmes by the Government of Zimbabwe and its partners. Such programmes could include:

1. Ensuring that there are no settlements in low lying areas, wetlands, and other known flood prone areas;
2. Education and information dissemination on disaster risks including mitigation measures to be taken at local levels to avoid loss of lives;
3. Ensuring that construction of infrastructure such as roads, bridges, schools and also public and private shelter facilities are of the highest quality standards. This should apply to renovation and repair of old infrastructure as well as the ongoing construction of the national road network and related facilities; and
4. Disaster risk assessment training to ensure adequate capacity within the Department of Civil Protection and all relevant stakeholders including community level structures.

The ZHRC has commenced an assessment of the human rights situation in the aftermath of the disaster and will be sharing a report on its findings and more specific recommendations in due course.