

## **PRESS STATEMENT ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN FARMING COMMUNITIES DURING THE NATIONAL LOCKDOWN**

13 May 2020

### **1. Mandate**

As part of its mandate to monitor the observance of human rights as provided at section 243 (1) (c) of the Constitution and the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission Act [Chapter 10:30], on the 8th May 2020, the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission embarked on monitoring of the human rights situation in farming communities in Chegutu District. The farms which were visited include Radion, KHB and Wicklow. The following human rights issues were observed:

### **2. Access to information (Section 62 of the Constitution)**

- The communities highlighted that they had limited knowledge on the COVID-19 pandemic since some of them do not have radios or mobile phones which are the main sources of information on the pandemic.
- Their limited knowledge on COVID-19 was also attributed to the fact that no representatives of government or non-governmental organisations were conducting community awareness programmes on symptoms, prevention and treatment of the coronavirus, on the farms.

### **3. Right to food and water (Section 77 of the Constitution)**

- Residents at all the three farms visited lamented the shortage of food. They said that the national lockdown was preventing them from working and fending for their families. Without any sources of income they cannot buy food for their families which are now having one meal per day. Due to failure to buy relish, they are now surviving on locusts referred to as “mahwiza” which they pick during the early morning hours at nearby forests.
- They also highlighted that they were not benefiting from public assistance programmes initiated by both government and other organisations which are only benefiting older persons who receive either a bag of maize or millet each.
- In terms of access to water, it was observed that at Radion and KHB Farms, there are no boreholes. Unprotected sources such as dams and wells are relied on for water supply. At Wicklow Farm, only one borehole is working and the others broke down. The single borehole also services a school which is at the farm, creating pressure on the borehole which is likely to break down soon as well due to over usage.
- At the borehole there are no disinfectants to use for ensuring non-transmission of the virus through physical contact with the borehole when drawing water and there are also no hand sanitisers for users of the borehole to use before touching the borehole.

### **4. Right to healthcare (Section 76 of the Constitution)**

- Residents at all the three farms highlighted that their main health facility is Chegutu District Hospital. Due to lack of income they cannot afford bus fare to travel to the hospital when cases of illness arise. Some said that even if they found money for bus fare and medical consultation

fees, they could not afford to pay for prescribed medication which was highly exorbitant and usually priced in foreign currency.

#### 5. Security of person (Section 52 of the Constitution)

The farm residents indicated that they did not encounter any forms of violence from law enforcement agencies but cases of domestic violence were prevalent. They cited lack of income and shortage of food as the main reasons for domestic disputes which ended up in physical violence.

#### 6. General observations

- The residents of the farms are farm workers and former farm workers of mostly foreign origin, who reside at the compound areas.
- At Radion Farm, the Commission noted that the residents comprised of predominantly women and children. The men were said to be engaging in income generating activities such as brick moulding. It was also highlighted that some of the men were incarcerated after committing offences such as theft of maize at neighbouring farms, in an effort to provide food for their families.
- At KHB Farm, most of the young men showed signs of intoxication and redundancy, without any meaningful economic and recreational activities to occupy their time.
- At Wicklow Farm, there is a significant population of older persons who were said to be receiving public assistance in the form of maize or millet from the Department of Social Welfare. However, this assistance was not enough to sustain their big families which did not have other forms of livelihoods.
- People at the farms live in farm compounds where the houses are closely built. Such living arrangements make confinement and social distancing a challenge due to the inevitable close interaction amongst the families. Life was therefore going on as usual without observation of preventive measures such as social distancing and wearing of face masks or other coverings for the nose and mouth.
- The farm residents indicated that it was difficult to comply with the requirement of constantly washing hands with clean water and soap since water and soap is not readily available.

#### 7. Recommendations

- The Department of Social Welfare and other organisations providing food relief should extend their vulnerability assessment criteria beyond older persons to include other people who are constrained from fending for themselves by the national lockdown.
- The Ministry of Local Government and Public Works should also facilitate installation of boreholes at Radion, KHB and Wicklow Farms which have perennial water challenges.
- Human rights organisations should extend their awareness programmes to farming communities such as Radion, KHB and Wicklow Farms where there is limited knowledge of human rights and remedies for human rights violations.
- Legal Aid Service Providers should assist families with members who have been incarcerated so that they access justice through provision of free legal advice and representation.

- The Ministry of Youth, Sport, Arts and Recreation as well as Youth organisations should extend their empowerment programmes to youths in farming communities where they end up engaging in crime and drug abuse due to redundancy and lack of sources of income.
- The Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprise Development should extend its empowerment programmes to farming communities such as Radion, KHB and Wicklow Farms where women are struggling to fend for their families and becoming victims of different forms of domestic violence.
- Organisations which promote rights of men and gender equality should also extend their programmes to men in farming communities who encounter various challenges to their masculinity and end up engaging in domestic violence or unlawful activities.
- The Ministry of Health and Child Care and other organisations which provide medical services should assist the farming communities with free medical care and medication.