



**REMARKS BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE ZIMBABWE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION (ZHRC),  
COMMISSIONER DR ELASTO HILARIOUS MUGWADI AT THE DONOR ROUND TABLE HELD AT  
THE UNDP BLOCK 11 CONFERENCE ROOM, HARARE, ON 22 JUNE 2018**

**Time: 08:30 Hrs**

1. The United Nations Resident Coordinator, Mr. Bishow Parajuli
2. The Head of the European Union Delegation, Mr. Van Damme
3. Your Excellencies, Ambassadors of Diplomatic Missions here present
4. Heads of the United Nations Agencies here present
5. International Development Agencies represented here
6. The Deputy Chairperson for the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission, Commissioner Dr Ellen Sithole and other Commissioners here present
7. The Executive Secretary of the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission, Dr. Makanatsa Makonese and other members of the Secretariat
8. Distinguished Guests
9. Ladies and Gentlemen
10. All Protocols Observed

On behalf of the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) and on my own behalf, I would like to heartily welcome you all to this conference where we hope to engage and deliberate with Your Excellencies and esteemed development partners on areas of possible collaboration to further enhance the capacity of ZHRC to effectively deliver on its dual constitutional mandate as provided for in the Constitution of Zimbabwe.

As you may all know, the timing for this conference has been a challenge as it was originally scheduled for November 2017, but had to be deferred to a later date due to political developments in the country that unfolded towards the end of 2017. However, citizens of Zimbabwe have even developed greater expectations from the Commission to deliver on many areas of its constitutional mandate, especially in enhancing human rights protection and promotion in the context of the forth-coming harmonised elections under the current political dispensation. It is my hope that this conference will enable the Commission to jointly explore with Your Excellencies and development partners, further areas of collaborative support as we look beyond the 2018 electoral period.

You are all aware that the journey of the establishment of the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission began with the creation of the Commission in 2009, followed by the subsequent swearing in of Commissioners in March 2010, and enactment of its enabling legislation, the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission Act, (Chapter 10:30) in October 2012. However, the Commission only became operational from June 2014 when the Secretariat came on board. I am happy that within the four years of activity the Commission has managed to garner international recognition. The Commission attained as you all know "A" Status accreditation with the Global



Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) in May 2016 and subsequently attained in November of the same year membership of the African Ombudsmen Mediators Association (AOMA), and is an affiliate member of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights and also plays an active role in the monitoring of the implementation of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendations by the Government of Zimbabwe.

The forthcoming elections scheduled for 30 July 2018 are the first to take place after the Commission became fully operational and the Commission is working to its optimum ability to contribute to the promotion of conditions that are conducive to free, fair and credible elections and a climate of tolerance in which electioneering activity takes place without fear or coercion, intimidation or reprisals. While the Commission acknowledges some positive amendments to the Electoral Act which was recently gazetted, it is however, unhappy with Part IX B, which qualifies ZHRC as observers and not monitors. This breaches the Constitutional provisions on the mandate of the Commission and our own recommendations to Parliament. Pursuant to this matter, the Commission has since engaged the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) and have come to a common understanding that the amendments will not compromise the Commission's constitutional mandate as human rights monitors.

In light of the aforesaid, the Commission continues to undertake its monitoring work unhindered. To date, the ZHRC has monitored, the Bio-Metric Voter Registration (BVR) exercise, the ZANU (PF) and MDC Alliance Primary Elections, Voters' Roll Inspection and the Nomination Courts in all the ten provinces in the country and has started monitoring campaign rallies. All the monitoring reports being generated will contribute to the pre-election report to be produced by the Commission.

The Commission has started intensifying its awareness-raising thrust on electoral rights by launching a campaign under the theme: **"My Vote, My Right, My Choice"** to promote awareness of electoral rights and visibility of the Commission. Weekly programmes that constitute the campaign are currently being aired on two radio stations, STAR FM and Radio Zimbabwe and ZBC-TV, complimented by leaflet inserts in local newspapers and a variety of other Information, Education and Communication print materials that are being distributed during outreaches and monitoring activities as part of the wider electoral rights campaign to promote free political choice.

The Commission is happy and feels encouraged that the call for free and fair elections is being led at the highest political leadership levels in the country and indeed by and large people have reported that the political space has opened up compared to the previous elections during the old dispensation. We believe that the unanticipated huge turn out of candidates at the Nomination Courts bear testimony to the positive political developments. However, from the interactions with stakeholders and complaints that have inundated the Commission since launching the electoral rights awareness campaign, incidents of politically motivated violence

though random and appearing uncoordinated appear to be on the increase, revolving around issues of intimidation, harassment and assault.

Over the years, politically motivated violence was by and large usually inter-party but intra party violence has prevailed in recent weeks arising from the primary elections, dissatisfaction over candidates selection and perceived imposition of candidates. This has translated into threats and intimidation of those who have decided to run as independents or who have broken away from particular Parties to form new Political Parties and are contesting the elections against their erstwhile comrades. Hate speech using social media and at rallies or using mainstream media is also an issue of concern as well as perceived manipulation of the BVR registration slips in order to discriminate people on the basis of political affiliation when accessing agricultural inputs, food aid and participating in developmental projects. There are also reports of intolerance by political party activists, local Political Parties chairpersons and traditional leadership being implicated in forcing people to attend certain rallies and threatening people for attending rallies of political parties of their choice. Our team of investigators is in the field to work with other players to nip such practices in the bud so that the situation is contained and a culture of peace pervades political activities.

While financial and other support received from the Government of Zimbabwe has significantly increased this year, the support from development partners still goes a long way to address funding gaps and alleviate the resource challenges the Commission continues to face. The services of the Commission are required countrywide, and therefore the Commission urgently needs sufficient infrastructure of various kinds to facilitate decentralization at least to all the provinces for a start. The Commission currently owns only one office building in Harare which however, does not have adequate office space whilst renting office premises in Bulawayo. The inability of the Commission to decentralize to other parts of the country continues to impact negatively on its visibility, effective service delivery to the remote areas and of course overall effectiveness of the Commission in protecting and promoting human rights broadly.

The Commission needs capacitation in critical areas relating to human resources as a stop gap measure as it continues to battle with Government to unfreeze posts. All the programmes units of the Commission have to be eventually unbundled to ensure all facets of the mandate and work of the Commission receives attention, and in this regard, the establishment of the Administrative Justice Unit, separate from the Human Rights Complaints Unit is long overdue. The Thematic Working Groups remain largely semi – functional as they are under-resourced and have no personnel of their own.

We however, heartily thank the United Nations Resident Coordinator, Mr. Bishow Parajuli and his team for their unwavering support which is extended particularly through the UNDP. We sincerely thank, the European Union for continued support rendered over the years since inception of the Commission. We are also grateful for the projects currently on board coordinated by TRACE, IOM and GIZ and all the funding partners behind the scenes. We are here



today appealing for more UN agencies and other development and funding partners to come on board to take the Commission to higher levels of capacitation for the benefit of the people of this beautiful country.

***With these few remarks, I would like to thank you all for coming.***