



SPEECH BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE ZHRC; COMMISSIONER E. H. MUGWADI AT THE UNITED NATIONS DAY COMMEMORATIONS: WHO PREMISES; 23 OCTOBER 2017

The Guest of Honour,

The UN Resident Coordinator, Mr. Bishow Parajuli

Honourable Ministers here present

Honourable Members of Parliament

UN Family Members

Representative of Constitutional Commissions

Senior Government Officials

Captains of Industry

Representatives of Civil Society Organisations

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Members of the Media Fraternity

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

All protocol observed

I feel greatly honoured for being accorded this opportunity in my capacity as Chairperson of the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) to deliver this short speech as a good friend and partner of the United Nations in commemoration of the United Nations Day. This day is celebrated on 24 October annually in honour of the anniversary of the signing of the United Nations Charter by the then UN Member States assembled in San-Francisco on 26 June 1945 when they committed themselves to save future generations from the ravages of war meted out on humanity during the 1st and 2nd World Wars. We are here therefore to show and express our solidarity with the UN body politic on this very important occasion.

When I was browsing through the 111 Articles of the Founding [Charter](#), I noticed that the term “human rights” had been mentioned not less than 7 times, making the promotion and protection of human rights one of the key purposes and guiding principles of the United Nations and positioning the Charter as the precursor of the 1948 [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) which



brought human rights into the realm of international law. Since then, the United Nations has worked diligently to promote and protect human rights through a multiplicity of legal instruments and practical ground activities. This role of the UN is synonymous with the mandate bestowed on National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) such as the ZHRC of promoting, and protecting human rights, democracy and good governance.

I was invited here ladies and gentlemen as the representative voice of the Human Rights Constituency and as a good institutional friend and partner of the United Nations. My voice firstly is that of gratitude and appreciation for the technical and financial support the UN through the UNDP and other agencies has rendered and continues to render to the five Independent Commissions Supporting Democracy in Zimbabwe as provided for in Chapter 12 of the Constitution, namely the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission, Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, The Zimbabwe Gender Commission, The Zimbabwe Media Commission and the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission. Secondly, I would want you all to know that the successful protection and promotion of human rights takes all of us to tango. It is not a one man or institution band. On behalf of the ZHRC, let me pay tribute to the immense contribution of the United Nations, through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) towards the capacitation of the Commission through institutional support under the Zimbabwe United Nations Development Assistance Framework (ZUNDAF I and II).

Although the Government of Zimbabwe has over the years progressively increased budget allocation and financial disbursements to the ZHRC, the initial stages of establishment were, due to the country's economic meltdown, bereft of resources to support immediate operationalisation of the Commission. There was no Secretariat to implement activities and very few other donors were willing to put their money into the project at that time. It is therefore not an exaggeration to say that without the support of the UNDP, the Commission could have had a still birth and I am sure this nasty experience could have replicated itself in other sister Commissions.

As you all know ladies and gentlemen, the work of the ZHRC had no precedent in the country on which to build or borrow from. The UNDP supported the exchange of experiences and best practices through funding of visits by Commissioners to other regional Commissions such as the Kenyan and South African Commissions and attendance at international human rights conferences to bring the Commissioners up to speed on the role and mandate of National Human Rights Institutions and perhaps, more importantly, to give them the confidence to provide leadership in shaping the ZHRC. The UNDP here and other development partners immensely contributed in putting together the nuts and bolts of the ZHRC, which additionally included procurement of office furniture and equipment and other tools of trade as well as putting in place operational systems and policies and of course facilitating the recruitment of the Secretariat.

Drawing from the experiences of the support extended to the ZHRC which is an iota of the global country package, I have no doubt in my mind that the UN plays a critical role in supporting the



Government of Zimbabwe to build strong and solid institutions that can assume a leading role in the promotion and protection of human rights which are inseparable from development. The need for such kind of support, has even become greater as the ZHRC, and indeed all other Independent Commissions Supporting Democracy roll out their services to both urban and rural grassroots communities.

It is my hope that through our concerted awareness campaigns, the generality of our people will clearly appreciate and peacefully enjoy their civil and political, economic, social and cultural rights enshrined in the Bill of Rights of our people driven Constitution. It will be amiss of me to end my short discourse without urging all our enthusiastic political actors to show restraint, tolerance, maturity and respect for the voter's fundamental rights as a guarantee for a peaceful and credible 2018 plebiscite.

Finally, in extending our heartfelt gratitude for the support given to date as already acknowledged, I would still courageously exhort the UN to upscale the development initiatives it is implementing in Zimbabwe including support to the ZHRC and Sister Commissions to fulfill their various mandates and to ensure that sustainable development, as guided by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2016 – 2030) becomes achievable.

I thank you!