



END OF YEAR STATEMENT BY THE ZIMBABWE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN ZIMBABWE IN LIGHT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

24 December 2020

1. As the year draws to an end, the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC/Commission) makes the following statement on the human rights situation in Zimbabwe during the course of 2020. The statement is informed by various human rights monitoring missions, outreaches and investigations conducted around the country on the situation of human rights in the wake of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.
2. The ZHRC acknowledges the efforts by the Government of Zimbabwe to improve the human rights of all persons in Zimbabwe in the face of a difficult year characterised by the COVID-19 pandemic and consequently a worldwide recession. Whilst conscious of the limitations of fundamental rights and freedoms in terms of sections 86 and 87 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe (Constitution), the ZHRC notes that the pandemic affected the enjoyment of human rights in Zimbabwe as it resulted in job losses, closure of schools impacting on the right to education, difficulty in accessing healthcare services and restriction on freedom of movement, assembly and association.
3. The responses by the Government of Zimbabwe to curb the spread of the virus from time of the total lockdown in March 2020, and in line with section 87 of the Constitution and the World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines, to the reopening of businesses and schools following a decline in the number of COVID-19 cases, remain commendable. The ZHRC notes that Government of Zimbabwe endeavored to ensure the right of access to information (section 62), on the spread of COVID-19 and its signs and symptoms were disseminated throughout the country. Indeed, even in the remotest villages, health workers passed on the message to communities on prevention and containment of the spread of the virus and it became the new normal

to mask up, sanitize, and wash hands regularly. Furthermore, as vulnerability increased due to the pandemic, Government stepped up efforts to distribute grain, provision of subsidised basic commodities and payment of COVID 19 allowances to civil servants and pensioners. This assisted in mitigating effects of the pandemic on socio-economic rights.

4. Despite efforts by the Government, it is noted that the right to life was seriously compromised due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In Zimbabwe, over 300 people have so far lost their lives and the numbers of those infected continues to rise. In addition the virus has caused serious health challenges and strained the health delivery system, impacting negatively on the right of access to health and consequently life.
5. The enjoyment of socio-economic rights continued to decline exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and a drought spanning over two years. In most communities assessed by ZHRC, it emerged that there were serious food insecurities. Equally contributing to food insecurity amongst communities was the general high cost of goods and services being charged in foreign currency. Civil servants, among others, were the hardest hit in terms of securing goods and services, as they had limited access to foreign currency.
6. The ZHRC noted with concern the increase in teenage pregnancies and child marriages due to the extended stay of children at home following the lockdown and closure of schools. It emerged that there was an increase in Gender Based Violence (GBV) cases in families and women in most cases were staying with perpetrators and lacked courage to report. In addition, women had increased burden of care work in the event of family members contracting COVID-19.
7. On the right to clean, safe and potable water, ZHRC noted that across most provinces there were challenges in accessing water by residents in both rural and urban communities. This challenge was heightened in Provinces such as Bulawayo Metropolitan and peri-urban areas in Harare Province where residents endured days without water or queuing for the precious liquid.
8. Quarantine centers for COVID-19 were one of the critical facilities when it came to the fight against the pandemic. However, these centres experienced a lot of challenges due to overcrowding and lack of necessary amenities such as water and food. The testing of persons admitted into the centres was not done in the stipulated timeframes,

resulting in some people overstaying, anxiety, and lack of cooperation from those admitted.

9. ZHRC noted that strict safety measures were put in place to limit the spread of the pandemic in institutions such as prisons, children's and old people's homes. Although Government and its partners supported most institutions with Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs), there remained glaring shortages of PPEs, thus putting the institutionalised persons at risk. In addition, the disbursements of per capita grants remained inconsistent, thereby affecting the operations at some of the homes, and in turn directly impacting on the enjoyment of basic human rights of the inmates.
10. The enjoyment of civil and political rights was not spared from the effects of the pandemic. During the total lockdown, restrictions on freedom of movement were effected in line with section 87 of the Constitution. However, the ZHRC expressed its concern at the postponement of by-elections as a COVID-19 response and opined that political rights in terms of section 67 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe should continue to be enjoyed whilst adhering to COVID-19 regulations.

11. Recommendations

The ZHRC makes the following recommendations;

The Government of Zimbabwe

- 11.1. The Government of Zimbabwe and its partners should continue cushioning vulnerable populations from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic through food assistance programmes, subsidised basic commodities and other social protection measures.
- 11.2. The Government of Zimbabwe should continue to progressively improve the working conditions of civil servants and frontline workers so as to protect their right to human dignity.
- 11.3. The Government of Zimbabwe should continue to observe and respect the political rights of all citizens as stated in the Constitution of Zimbabwe, without fear or favour.
- 11.4. The Government of Zimbabwe should improve and expand health facilities that cater for COVID-19 victims.
- 11.5. The Government of Zimbabwe should ensure that there is adequate PPE in institutions where it is required.
- 11.6. The Government of Zimbabwe should continue to disseminate information and conscientisation of citizens on COVID-19.

11.7. The Government of Zimbabwe should quickly take measures to deal with any new waves of the pandemic.

Citizens

11.8. The generality of the population of Zimbabwe should continue to observe the COVID-19 regulations and protect themselves and their families from the spread of the pandemic.

Compliments of the season and please observe all the COVID-19 protocols to stay alive.

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