



**ZIMBABWE HUMAN
RIGHTS COMMISSION
HUMAN RIGHTS
SITUATION REPORT
2025**

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC/Commission) has a dual mandate. It is firstly the National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) of Zimbabwe, that is established by Section 242 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe and operates in terms of the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission Act [Chapter 10:30] with the mandate, in terms of section 243 of the Constitution, to protect, promote and enforce human rights. It is an accredited NHRI with an 'A' status, by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI).

The ZHRC is, secondly the Public Protector/ Ombuds Institution of Zimbabwe in terms of section 243 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, with the mandate to protect the public from maladministration and the abuse of power by public officials, thereby promoting administrative justice. It is a member of the International Ombudsman Institute (IOI), and the Association of Ombudsmen & Mediators of Africa (AOMA) with voting rights.

The Commission fulfils this mandate through investigations of human rights and administrative justice complaints, public human rights education and awareness, human rights research and advocacy and monitoring human rights compliance and inspections. This report presents the ZHRC's overview of the human rights situation in Zimbabwe for the year 2025. The report highlights the progress made in the enjoyment of human rights, challenges that persist, and efforts made to address these challenges.

2. ZIMBABWE'S COMPLIANCE WITH HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS

2.1. Ratification of key human rights instruments

2.1.1. The ZHRC notes that during the reporting period, the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) made significant efforts to uphold its international and regional human rights obligations. This was done through aligning national legislation to the Constitution, and reforms aimed at strengthening institutions and enhancing public participation. The Government's

compliance with international human rights instruments, is important in facilitating legal and institutional reforms. International treaties provide guidance in benchmarking the development of Zimbabwe's domestic laws. Furthermore, the ZHRC takes note of the second republic's agenda on re-engagement, demonstrating political will in promoting human rights and administrative justice. This is important for fostering relations and confidence with the international community.

- 2.1.2. The ZHRC commends the Government of Zimbabwe for submitting State party reports, including those that were overdue. This is the first time that Zimbabwe is up to date with its treaty obligations. These include, the 2nd to 12th periodic report on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which was due in 2002 and submitted in 2021, the 2nd to 12th periodic report on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights due in 2001 and submitted 2022, the 16th periodic report on the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) submitted in 2024 but due in 2019, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol) and 1st periodic report to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC submitted in 2019 when it was due.
- 2.1.3. In March 2025, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICRMW) came into force for Zimbabwe. Migration plays a significant role in Zimbabwe's social and economic landscape, shaping the country's labour market, communities, and policies. Migrant workers in Zimbabwe often face legal, economic, and social obstacles, including employment discrimination, limited access to social services, and risk of detention under immigration laws. Thus, the ratification of the ICRMW is a positive step by the Government towards addressing these challenges.
- 2.1.4. In addition, the ZHRC applauds the Government for its consistency in the reporting to the Universal Periodic Review (UPR)¹ 1st Cycle in 2011, 2nd

¹ The Universal Periodic Review is a process where the United Nations member States review each other on how each respective country is doing in terms on human rights. After every four-year cycle, each country shares their progress on what they have done to promote human rights, with fellow States giving feedback and recommendations on improvement. This process is important as it encourages

Cycle in 2016 and 3rd Cycle in 2022. During the third cycle of the UPR, in 2022, Zimbabwe received two hundred and thirty-six (236) recommendations from forty-two (42) countries. Most of these recommendations relate to the protection of freedom of speech, improving judicial independence and ratifying key human rights treaties such as the ICRMW. In 2025, ZHRC notes that the Government has commenced consultative processes for drafting of the 4th cycle report due in 2026.

2.1.5. Through its work, the ZHRC takes note of the reports and allegations relating to enforced disappearances and abductions for instance the case of Namatai Kwekweza, Robson Chere and Simon Gwenzi, incidences of torture inhuman and cruel treatment of persons reported during the arrests of ninety-five (95) people on March 31 protests, among other human rights issues. The Commissions acknowledges that the Constitution of Zimbabwe has provisions that seek to address some of the human rights challenges that have been raised above. Nevertheless, in addition to the constitutional provisions on the protection of human rights, the ZHRC finds it equally important for the Government of Zimbabwe to commit to further strengthening its human rights protection obligation through the ratification of key international human rights instruments, that address the topical human rights issues in the country.

2.1.6. The ZHRC therefore urges the Government of Zimbabwe to;

- i. Continue complying with its reporting obligations in a timely manner;
- ii. Continue with the wide and all-encompassing UPR consultation processes.
- iii. Comply with concluding recommendations of treaty bodies and recommendations of the UPR before the relevant ensuing cycles
- iv. Domesticate the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICRMW).
- v. Ratify the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment and its Optional Protocol that

States improve their human rights situation, learn from others, and be transparent about their progress and challenges.

establishes a Preventive Mechanism Against Torture. It is one of the two (2) African countries that have not ratified it.

- vi. Ratify the Convention on the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearances.
- vii. Ratify the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

2.2. Zimbabwe Compliance Status to the African Union (AU) Mechanisms

- 2.2.1. Zimbabwe is a State Party to a number of African Union (AU) mechanisms, such as the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR), 1986; African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), 1995; AU Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption, 2007; Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), 2008; African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Disability Protocol) 2018; the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG), 2019 and the Protocol to the Constitutive Act of the African Union Relating to the Pan-African Parliament, 2022.
- 2.2.2. By ratifying these AU instruments, Zimbabwe commits to aligning its national laws, policies, and practices with the normative regional human rights standards, and is subject to periodic oversight by AU treaty bodies. Zimbabwe is up to date in the submission of periodic reports to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, and the latest was reviewed in May 2025 during the 83rd Ordinary of the ACHPR session in Banjul, The Gambia. To compliment this process, the ZHRC submitted an alternative report on Government's compliance with the Treaty. The regular reporting and engagement with AU treaty bodies, assists the country in identifying implementation gaps, areas of reforms, and promoting transparency.

- 2.2.3. In May 2025, the Chairperson of the ZHRC Ms. Fungayi Jessie Majome, moved a motion for Member States of the ACHPR, to accord more prominence to the observance of Africa Human Rights Day, celebrated on 21 October annually. The motion was adopted by the ACHPR and the

Network of African National Human Rights Institutions (NANHRI) Steering Committee. This culminated in the first national Africa Human Rights Day commemoration by the ZHRC on the 21st of October 2025, under the theme “*Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations*”. The theme highlighted AU’s commitment to group rights and addressing the historical injustices such as slavery, colonialism, apartheid and systemic discrimination endured by Africans and people of African descent, through comprehensive reparatory justice.

2.2.4. The ZHRC recommends GoZ to:

- i. Ratify the African Union Convention on Ending Violence against Women and Girls (adopted February 2025).
- ii. Scale up commemoration of the Africa Human Rights Day as a national event.

2.3. Key Developments in Zimbabwe National Law in 2025

- 2.3.1. The Constitution of Zimbabwe, Chapter 4, is dedicated to the protection of human rights. It establishes the Declaration of Rights as the foundation for safeguarding fundamental freedoms, including the right to life, personal liberty, and human dignity. Moreover, Chapter 4 highlights the importance of these rights within a democratic society and sets limitations only when necessary and reasonable, thus upholding human rights as a core constitutional value.
- 2.3.2. In 2025, Zimbabwe experienced significant legal developments with human rights implications, among them being the historic abolition of the death penalty. The Death Penalty Abolition Act [Chapter 9:26], signed into law on 31 December 2024, came into effect in 2025, ending capital punishment for all crimes within the country.
- 2.3.3. The ZHRC notes that the High Court judgement in the case of *Media Alliance of Zimbabwe and another vs the Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs and another (HCH 4849/23)* struck down repressive penalties in terms of Section 22 A (3)² of the Criminal Law and Codification Act (Patriotic Act), that inhibited freedoms of expression, assembly, and

association. This judicial oversight reinforced civil liberties against legal restrictions designed to suppress dissenting voices and political participation.

2.3.4. Conversely, some legislative measures, such as the Private Voluntary Organisations (PVO) Act [Chapter 17:05], pose restrictions on civic space. Further, reforms targeting child protection, workplace rights, community participation, and environmental justice were advanced through Bills such as the Child Justice Bill, Mines and Minerals Bill, and Parks and Wildlife Amendment Bill. These laws seek to secure rights of vulnerable populations, child protection, promote gender equality, ensure environmental protection, and provide compensation for human-wildlife conflicts.

2.3.5. Moreso, ZHRC took note of the Broadcasting Services Amendment Act, No. 2 of 2025, which reshaped the media regulatory landscape of Zimbabwe. The Amendment Act sought in certain respects to align the broadcasting laws with the Constitution and modernize regulation for digital services. Of concern to the ZHRC has been the amendment of section 38B of the Broadcasting Services Act³ which conditions the issuance of motor vehicle licenses and insurance policies on the possession of a Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) radio listener's license or an exemption certificate. Linking vehicle licensing and insurance to a ZBC radio listener's license raises concerns, apart from the licence's significant cost, about freedom of choice in information sources. This undermines the right to freedoms of movement, expression and access to information and obliges people to financially support a State-run broadcaster whose editorial content is partisan in violation of the section 61 (4) constitutional guarantee of media freedom through the requirement of State owned media to be impartial, independent and accessible to divergent and dissenting views, a regression of the rights that the Zimbabwean Constitution seeks to protect.⁴ This restriction not only infringes on the right to information but also violates principles of consumer protection, which emphasize transparency and fair access to information in the marketplace. The Consumer Protection Act

³ [Chapter 12:06]

⁴ Freedom of expression is undeniably linked to the realization of Civil and Political rights at large.

[Chapter 14:44] prohibits unfair trading practices and ensures that consumers are not compelled to purchase services unrelated to the product they are seeking. Additionally, the general populace also raised concerns over the licencing fees which they considered expensive. In this regard, the GoZ made a commitment to review the licensing fees.

2.3.6. Despite some of the advances mentioned above, legislative gaps remain that impede the full realization of human rights in Zimbabwe. There is need for specific legislation on internally displaced persons (IDPs) to provide protection, remedies, and durable solutions, in line with the African Union Kampala Convention, which Zimbabwe has ratified.

2.3.7. The ZHRC recommends the GoZ to:

- i. Prioritize enacting comprehensive IDP legislation.
- ii. Remove emergency death penalty reinstatement provisions.
- iii. Review laws curbing civic space to protect freedom of association and political rights.
- iv. To undertake a comprehensive economic and human rights impact assessment of the implications of the Broadcasting Services Amendment Act, particularly the requirement for motorists to pay radio listeners' licenses.

3. CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

Civil and political rights are fundamental human rights that protect individuals' freedoms and ensure their ability to participate freely in the political and social life of their country. These rights include, but are not limited to, the right to life, liberty, and security of person, freedom from torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, the right to a fair trial, freedoms of expression, assembly, and association, and the right to participate in public affairs.

Zimbabwe is a State party to several international and regional treaties that affirm and protect these rights. Notably, Zimbabwe ratified the International Covenant on Civil

and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 1991, which obligates the government to uphold the core principles of non-discrimination, due process, and political participation. Additionally, Zimbabwe is a signatory to regional instruments such as the ACHPR, which provides for these civil and political rights. The Constitution provides comprehensive protection for civil and political rights.

3.1. Right to life

International and regional instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, ICCPR and the UNCRPD, amongst others, guarantee the universality of the right to life. Zimbabwe made significant progress by officially abolishing the death penalty, through the enactment of the Death Penalty Abolition Act [Chapter 9:26]. This landmark legislation prohibits any court from imposing the death sentence, and mandated that all sixty (60) individuals who were on death row be re-sentenced⁵. This reforms Zimbabwe's criminal justice system in alignment with global human rights standards, accentuating the sanctity of life and humane treatment of offenders. However, the ZHRC notes that there is a provision allowing the death penalty to be reinstated during states of public emergency as declared under section 113 of the Constitution, a potential loophole undermining the full abolition.

3.2. Access to Documentation

3.2.1. Access to documentation is a key component that facilitates the realization of many other rights, and is a constitutional right itself in terms of sections 35 (3) (b-c) and 66 (1) (c). The ZHRC notes improvement in the services of the Civil Registry Department (CRD) in standardizing policies to ensure that citizens receive consistent information regarding the documentation acquisition process. Furthermore, the CRD established additional sub-offices in various districts, which has improved accessibility to services. For example, in Midlands Province, three e-passport offices were established in Gweru, Zvishavane, and Gokwe South. In addition, Bulawayo Province opened more sub-offices in Pumula, Nketa and Entumbane. In Mashonaland Central Province, the ZHRC established that more sub-offices were opened in Districts such as Muzarabani, Mbire and Guruve.

⁵ Through follow up at the time of reporting, ZHRC noted that 44 individuals had their sentences commuted to different sentences

Additionally, the CRD capacitated the traditional leaders to record births and deaths in their jurisdictions, through the Active Notification Process⁶. However, the CRD indicated that it lacks resources and capacity to efficiently offer its services.

3.2.2. The ZHRC has formally raised concern with the CRD in a policy advisory brief about the prohibitive and exorbitant costs to the public, of acquiring the Zimbabwe passport. The ZHRC has noted that the costs are astronomically higher than those of passports in the region. This steep cost undermines the rights to freedom of movement in terms of the right to a passport in terms section 66 (1)(c) and the right to leave Zimbabwe in terms of section 66 (2)(c), as well as a host of other economic, social and cultural rights.

3.2.3. ZHRC recommends the GoZ to;

- i. Ratify the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.
- ii. Increase awareness on policy reforms and developments on registration processes.
- iii. Increase public awareness on the requirements and process acquiring national registration documents
- iv. Reduce passport costs in general, and introduce lower fees for passports of people living with disability and children, and provide a cheaper and smaller passport option.
- v. Adequately capacitate and resource the CRD.

3.3. Rights of arrested and detained persons

3.3.1. The GoZ has put in place progressive efforts, policies and laws towards improving the rights of arrested and detained persons. These include abiding by the constitutional provisions of presenting accused persons to the courts within 48 hours; enactment of the Prisons and Correctional Service Act [Chapter 7:21], which aligns with the international guidelines on rights of detained persons; and mainstreaming human rights in the training of Prisons and Police Service recruits and in-service officers. ZHRC notes a decrease in the reports of torture and ill-treatment of inmates in places of

⁶ This is a system where designated officials such as village heads are involved in the documentation process through identifying and recording births and deaths in their communities.

detention. Through the Commission’s monitoring function, it was observed that there has been improvement in the provision and quality of food.

3.3.2. However, crowding⁷ in most detention facilities is putting pressure on the existing infrastructure and available resources. Furthermore, detained persons lack adequate clothing and bedding impeding the right to human dignity.

3.3.3. The ZHRC also notes a disturbing trend of prolonged pre-trial incarceration of people arrested in case of political interest, bucking the commendable trend of recognizing the rights to personal liberty in terms of section 49 (1) (a) – not to be detained without trial, and 50(1)(d) to be released on bail unless there are compelling circumstances.

3.3.4. The ZHRC recommends the GoZ to;

- i. Consider construction of new detention facilities that meet international standards.
- ii. Provide adequate resources to detention facilities.
- iii. Continue implementation of alternatives to detention.
- iv. Take steps to ensure that all rights of detained persons including the rights of arrested political figures and persons involved in cases of political interest are enjoyed all of the time.

3.4. Political rights

3.4.1. During 2025, the GoZ successfully conducted by-elections, upholding the tenets of a democratic society. The ZHRC notes a decrease in cases of politically motivated violence during elections. The by-elections conducted in 2025, were mostly held in an orderly manner. However, challenges noted include limited voter education and low voter turnout. The ZHRC observed the limited representation of local observers during the by-elections. There were cases of political intolerance from some traditional leaders; political

⁷ The current statistics of inmates is approximately above 23 000 inmates against a holding capacity of 17 000

parties used hate speech and tore down posters of other candidates. There was also limited access to the State-owned media by opposition political contenders in violation of the constitutional right to media freedom in terms of section 61(3).

3.4.2. In the period under review the Commission observed a worrying manifestation of political intolerance to divergent views particularly in the debate on the proposed extension of presidential terms. It was disconcerted by what appears to be an arson attack at SAPES Trust a few hours before a scheduled public debate and the reported petrol bombing of the home of a constitution reform opponent, the deployment of police trucks at the offices of a constitutional amendment opponent and the reported formation of an intimidatory group purporting to silence criticism of the head of State. Section 67(2) guarantees everyone the right to participate in peaceful activities to influence, challenge or support the policies of Government or any political or whatever cause.

3.4.3. The ZHRC issued a statement underscoring, and reiterates that the proponents of the constitutional reform for extension of presidential terms have a constitutional right to campaign for it peacefully and democratically, while the opponents have an identical right to oppose it; that both sides must respect this, and the debate must be vigorous and robust for the ultimate benefit of Zimbabweans.

3.4.4. The ZHRC recommends the GoZ to;

- i. Increase voter education during the election period.
- ii. Ensure that traditional leaders remain non-partisan in their conduct during elections.
- iii. Enact legislation to establish the traditional leaders' Integrity and Ethics Committee mandated by section 287 of the Constitution
- iv. Encourage political parties to exercise political tolerance and become accustomed to peaceful debate, and agreeable disagreement
- v. Reform the State funded media to ensure it is accessible to divergent views in accordance with the constitutional right.

3.5. Arbitrary arrests and detention

3.5.1. The ZHRC, through its monitoring of prisons and police cells, and complaints intake and investigations, notes cases of arbitrary arrests and prolonged pretrial detentions. In June 2025, the Commission published a statement condemning the indefinite detention following the arrest of human rights activists, journalists and general citizens that include; Blessed Mhlanga, Faith Zaba, and the 94 alleged demonstrators (following Blessed Geza's call for 31 March demonstrations). Some of those arrested and detained persons reported abuse and torture by the police officers during arrest.

3.5.2. The ZHRC was encouraged by the positive developments that followed this monitoring mission to the detention facilities, where some of the challenges faced by persons under prolonged detention were immediately addressed. For example, Blessed Mhlanga and the other 94 detainees were granted bail in line with the rights guaranteed in section 50 (1)(d) of the Constitution.

3.5.3. ZHRC recommends the GoZ to;

- i. Ensure judicial and prosecution officials recognize and respect the right to bail of all persons including those individuals' facing cases of political interest unless there are compelling reasons justifying continued detention.
- ii. Conduct thorough investigations into allegations of police misconduct and ensure accountability for any abuses.
- iii. Encourage police to desist from arresting to investigate.

3.6. Right to Human Dignity and Privacy

3.6.1. Section 51 of the Constitution guarantees the right to human dignity. The Cyber and Data Protection Act [Chapter 12:07] establishes guidelines for safeguarding the rights of Zimbabwean citizens, highlighting the right to privacy and protection against unauthorized recording and distribution of personal information. Specifically, Section 164A of the Act, prohibits recording an individual without their consent, a provision that applies to filming in traditional courts unless explicit consent has been obtained.

3.6.2. The ZHRC, through its media monitoring, notes the rise in the recording and dissemination of Chief's Court proceedings across various online platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and WhatsApp. Often, litigants involved in these proceedings are verbally and emotionally abused, and their private issues are publicly shared and ridiculed. Such actions violate the right to human dignity and privacy as enshrined in the Constitution.

3.6.3. The ZHRC recommends the GoZ to;

- i. Develop and enforce policies that regulate and or prohibit the recording and dissemination of court proceedings, in line with Section 164A of the Cyber and Data Protection Act.
- ii. Raise awareness and educate the public to inform litigants, court officials, and the general public about the legal rights related to privacy, human dignity, and the consequences of unauthorized recording.

3.7. Freedoms to Demonstrate and Petition, Freedoms of Expression, Assembly and Association

In 2025, there were human rights concerns in the enjoyment of to demonstrate and petition, and freedoms of expression, assembly and association. These include the need to balance between the right to protest and maintain public order and security, while not creating a legally unsupported authority to 'sanction' demonstrations. Calls for demonstrations by organizers were met with warnings from the police and other authorities to the effect that they were 'unauthorized' yet there is no legal basis for such 'sanctioning' of demonstrations, and threats of arrests. This is despite the clear guarantee by section 59 of the Constitution of the right to demonstrate and petition, provided it is peaceful, and the section 58 right to freedom of assembly.

The ZHRC recommends the GoZ to;

- vi. Ensure the enjoyment of the freedoms to demonstrate and petition, and of expression, association and assembly by everyone as provided for in the Constitution.

3.8. Arbitrary evictions and internal displacements

Section 74 of the Constitution prohibits eviction without a court order and full consideration of circumstances. During the reporting period, ZHRC took note of a number of arbitrary evictions and internal displacements in the country, amongst them being the Cloverdale farm evictions. ZHRC observed that legal proceedings related to some evictions were delayed, thereby limiting displaced persons' access to justice. These internal displacements lead to further human rights violations, including lack of adequate standard of living and the right to human dignity. In addition, evictions disproportionately affect vulnerable groups including women, children, and the elderly, who face higher risks of exploitation and human rights abuses during displacement. Equally of concern, has been the delay by the State, to find durable solutions for the Cloverdale IDPs staying in makeshift structures in Goromonzi, who have been enduring the rainy season in the open.

The ZHRC recommends the GoZ to;

- i. Protect individuals' rights during evictions, ensuring all processes comply with the law and human rights standards.
- ii. Provide durable and sustainable solutions to displacements.

4. ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

- a) Socio-economic and cultural rights (ESC) are the entitlements that individuals and communities require to live a life of dignity. These include the right to food, housing, health care, education and cultural identity. These rights are enshrined in Chapter 4 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe and are subject to progressive realization. Zimbabwe ratified various regional and international human rights instruments which include the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural rights (ICESCR) and the ACHPR. During the period under review, the GoZ made progress in the promotion and protection of socio- economic and cultural rights.
- b) The GoZ is the primary duty-bearer and has an obligation to guarantee these rights, through the direct delivery of goods and services as well as creation of a conducive environment for private sector investment and growth. It is commendable that the GoZ increased funding and support to infrastructure

development that include roads, dams and power generation. To address the outcry on the cost of doing business in Zimbabwe and consequent closure of formal businesses and loss of jobs, the GoZ in 2025 started reviewing regulatory licensing fees and taxes. In terms of Section 317 of the Constitution, the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) has the responsibility to regulate the monetary system, to protect the currency of Zimbabwe in the interest of economic growth, and to formulate and implement monetary policy. It is commendable that progress has been realized towards stabilizing the local currency, exchange rates, inflation and other economic fundamentals. Such positive developments contributed to increased economic growth.

4.1. Right to Healthcare

4.1.1. The GoZ has implemented various initiatives in promoting the right to healthcare. The interventions in the sector are mainly towards HIV/ AIDS and tuberculosis (TB) prevention and expanding care for vulnerable populations, as well as, enhancing service delivery nationwide. Notable support is also channelled towards increased digital technology in health service delivery, non-communicable diseases, and child immunization programmes, aiming to bolster primary healthcare and promote adolescent engagement and skills development.⁸ Major referral hospitals, have benefitted from refurbishments, installation of new medical equipment and construction. Medical equipment was procured at Parirenyatwa Group of Hospitals, Mpilo Central, United Bulawayo Hospitals, Masvingo, Chivhu, Zvishavane, Murewa, Gweru, Maphisa and Filabusi Hospitals, amongst others⁹.

4.1.2. While these interventions are commendable, the ZHRC notes with concern the decline in the share of health spending in government expenditure. Health spending as a share of total government expenditure is an indicator of the priority given to the health sector. In the 2025 budget year, ZiG28,³

⁸ Government Of Zimbabwe 2025 Mid-Term Budget And Economic Review
<https://zimtreasury.co.zw/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/THE-2025-MID-TERM-BUDGET-AND-ECONOMIC-REVIEW.pdf>

⁹ The equipment included the following, among others, 60 infant mobile incubators with monitors; 5 neonatal resuscitation trolleys; 7 steriliser steam autoclaves; 5 electrosurgical units (diathermy); dialysis machines

billion was allocated to health care representing 10,2% of the national budget. This is a drop from 10,6% allocated in 2024¹⁰. This allocation falls short of the Abuja Declaration target, which calls on African nations to dedicate at least 15% of their budgets to healthcare.

4.1.3. The assessment of public health facilities conducted by the ZHRC revealed inadequate medical equipment, and insufficient personnel. The healthcare workforce crisis has deepened, with doctor-to-population ratios far below World Health Organization recommendations and concentrated in urban areas, leaving rural facilities severely understaffed and often reliant on minimally trained personnel.

4.1.4. Maternal healthcare remains a critical concern, with many families struggling to access basic medical care or forego treatment altogether. The Ministry of Health and Child Care reported that nearly three hundred (300) infants and fifty -four (54) women died due to complications during childbirth in January 2025, with Harare recording the highest number of neonatal deaths. The country remains among the top three countries in Southern Africa with the highest maternal mortality ratio, at 462 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, significantly above the national target of 240 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births¹¹.

4.1.5. In addition to the brain drain, the ZHRC has recorded significant medication and resource constraints in public health facilities that often face recurrent stock-outs of essential medicines and consumables, limiting access to basic and emergency care. Most of these facilities have inadequate funding for private procurement of essential medication and the National Pharmacy (NatPharm) is failing to bridge the gap. The ZHRC also took note of reports from communities and the media, regarding the influx of unregulated cheap medicines and herbal treatments in the market. People have resorted to

¹⁰ 2025 National Budget statement <https://zimtreasury.co.zw/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/2025-National-Budget-Statement-FINAL.pdf>

¹¹ <https://healthtimes.co.zw/2025/01/31/zimbabwes-data-to-policy-insights-reveal-solutions-to-curb-maternal-mortality-costly-cancer-diagnoses-unregistered-deaths-rising-gbv-cases/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CZimbabwe%20remains%20among%20the%20top%20births%2C%E2%80%9D%20said%20>

using alternative and unsafe medical treatments, due to incapacitation to meet the proper treatment costs. In addition, some hospitals and clinics, particularly in rural and remote areas, continue to operate with inadequate infrastructure. Aging facilities, poor maintenance, and limited diagnostic and treatment capacity further restrict the accessibility and quality of healthcare services.

4.1.6. The ZHRC notes the absence of practical steps towards ensuring that 'no one is refused emergency treatment in any healthcare institution' as provided by section 76(3) of the Constitution.

4.1.7. The Commission also notes with concern shortages of psychiatric drugs in public hospitals and incarceration facilities, the resurgence of leprosy, and the withdrawal of funding support to HIV/AIDS programmes by the USAID in its closure, all calling for concerted attention to the risks such phenomena pose to the enjoyment of the right to healthcare by the everyone.

4.1.8. The ZHRC recommends the GoZ to;

- i. Increase health sector funding to at least 15% of the national budget in line with the Abuja Declaration.
- ii. Commence plans and a strategy for practical policy measures to realise the right not to be refused emergency medical care anywhere.
- iii. Pay special attention to vulnerable populations such as those suffering from mental illness and those at risk of leprosy.

4.2. Right to Education

4.2.1. Section 75 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe provides that every citizen and permanent resident of Zimbabwe has a right to a basic State funded education. The State must take measures to progressively facilitate the realization of this right. To satisfy the requirements of this provision the GoZ has the responsibility to establish and sustain well equipped schools with relevant personnel and learning materials for the enjoyment of this right. The current situation in the Zimbabwean education system does not align to these provisions. Families are expected to pay for education services in both

public and private schools. Most public schools lack adequate classroom space, learning materials, sanitation facilities and safe drinking water sources thereby compelling parents and guardians to fund the school operations. These challenges have led to sprouting of unregulated private schools thereby compromising the quality of education and exposing children to possible abuse.

4.2.2. The GoZ has put in place Education General Regulations (S. I 13 of 2025) that prohibits the expulsion of pregnant girls from school (Section 12) and that every child of school-going age (from 4 years old) be afforded equal opportunity to access education (Section 4). The regulations further provides that no child shall be barred from school for failing to pay fees or not having a birth certificate. Additionally, the GoZ, through the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare, has continued to implement the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) for vulnerable students. The ZHRC acknowledges Government's social protection programmes aimed at eradicating child poverty through schemes such as BEAM, school feeding programmes, harmonized social cash transfers and per capita grants among others. However, there are challenges with late disbursements for BEAM funds, with some schools refusing to admit more learners under the scheme.

4.2.3. The ZHRC recommends the GoZ to;

- i. Enforce Section 75(1) of the Constitution and section 4(1) of the Education Amendment Act, which provides that every child shall be entitled to compulsory basic state funded education.
- ii. Prioritise the rehabilitation of dilapidated schools and infrastructure to meet the global minimum standards.

4.3. Right to food and water

4.3.1. Section 77 of the Constitution guarantees the right to sufficient food and safe, clean and potable water. The State has the responsibility to progressively achieve the realization of this right. During the period under review, The GoZ continued to partner with organisations such as United

Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), to implement the Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP), through the implementation of Statutory Instrument 13 of 2025 which mandates all schools to provide at least one hot meal per day. A budget of USD\$ 4 410 929 was allocated by the GoZ to finance the school feeding programme.

4.3.2. During inspection of places of detention, the ZHRC noted an improvement in the provision of food to both inmates and staff. Additionally, the GoZ has continued to provide aid to farmers through the *Pfumvudza/ Intwasa* Programme, to promote the right to food. The GoZ, through the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries and Rural Development, has made progress in fulfilling the right to food and water through the solar-powered borehole drilling scheme. However, the persistent unavailability of clean, safe and potable water across the country has resulted in communities to rely on unsafe, contaminated sources and increasing the risk of waterborne diseases such as cholera and typhoid. The ZHRC is concerned about the continued discharge of untreated effluents, hazardous chemicals, and mine waste into rivers and groundwater system by mining and industrial operations.

4.3.3. The ZHRC recommends the GoZ to;

- i. Ensure adequate budgetary support for water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services in national and local authority budgets.

4.4. Labour Rights

4.4.1. Section 65 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe guarantees the right to fair and safe labour practices and standards. The Commission notes that the GoZ has established and maintained labour relations frameworks that promote employer-employee relations. Progress has been made in promoting worker organisations and trade unions for workers to organise themselves, including engaging in collective bargaining and tripartite negotiating mechanisms to improve working conditions.

4.4.2. Despite some of these positive measures, challenges persist in the fulfilment of workers' rights in Zimbabwe. Public-sector workers continue to receive low salaries which makes it difficult to afford a decent standard of living. The ZHRC is concerned about formal businesses facing viability challenges leading to closure of businesses resulting in poverty, job losses and limited income options.

4.4.3. High unemployment levels have led to a surge in unregulated and often chaotic informal trade. This has eroded the tax base resulting in a heavy tax burden on the formal workers. The country continues to face a rise in skills flight and irregular migration. The industrial action by nurses at Sally Mugabe Hospital and lecturers at the University of Zimbabwe indicated the need for more concerted efforts to improve working conditions of public sector workers in general. Allegations of abuse of workers have been rampant, particularly those who work in factories, mining and construction companies.

4.4.4. The ZHRC recommends the GoZ to;

- i. Improve working conditions and wages for public sector workers.
- ii. Enforce labour laws to address abuse of workers in sectors such as mining, construction and manufacturing companies.

4.5. The State of Public Transportation

4.5.1. Public transport plays a pivotal role in the realisation of fundamental human rights. Adaptable, reliable, accessible, sustainable, resilient to disruption, and affordable transport is essential for accessing economic and social opportunities¹² such as education services, health care, employment, markets, and participation in civic life. An integrated public transport system also provides passengers with better travel experiences by making it easier and more convenient to use, maximizes public transport ridership and

¹² <https://post.parliament.uk/the-role-of-transport-in-improving-access-to-opportunities/>

revenue, increases customer satisfaction, reduces costs and subsidies and generate environmental, social and economic benefits for the investment ¹³.

- 4.5.2. The rural transport framework remains fragmented with more than half of Zimbabweans that live in rural areas often relying on an inefficient, slow, non-motorised intermediate means of transport including wheelbarrows, scotch carts and bicycles for their mobility needs, to access facilities such as commercial centres, clinics, water sources, grinding mills, schools, markets for produce and inputs¹⁴.
- 4.5.3. Urban Zimbabweans who cannot afford to buy cars fare no better as they resort to unsafe minibuses, pirate taxis, unventilated goods vans and open pick-up trucks all open to the elements, routinely spending hours on end waiting to commute to and from work. A consequence of this is heavily congested roads with its attendant social, economic and human security concerns.
- 4.5.4. Public transport in Zimbabwe remains inefficient, fragmented, marred with informal and unregulated taxis that offer uncoordinated transport services. The dominance of informal transport service providers has further exacerbated public transportation challenges such as human rights violations, inconsistent service delivery and fares, safety risks, transport exclusion that disproportionately affects vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities, children, women and the elderly. This undermines the public's enjoyment of socio-economic human rights such as the right to education, dignity, equality, personal security, freedom of movement, healthcare, and employment.

- 4.5.5. The ZHRC recommends the GoZ to;

- i. Provide a safe and reliable public transport system across the country.
- ii. Protect citizens from harassment by some transport operators.

¹³ World Bank (2025) Public Transport Service Optimization and System Integration, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/322961468019179668/pdf/953220BRIooPUBooIntegrationNoteoEN.pdf>

¹⁴ Kamoyo, M and Chikazhe, L. (2024). Public Transport Sector Challenges and Zimbabwe's Untapped Economic Opportunities. *Transportation in Developing Economies* (2025) 11:25 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40890-025-00244-2>

5. PROTECTION OF VULNERABLE GROUPS

In 2025, Zimbabwe introduced a number of measures to strengthen human rights protection of vulnerable populations, signalling a transformative commitment to justice, dignity, and equality. Legislative frameworks and policy initiatives addressing the unique needs of persons with disabilities, internally displaced persons, intersex persons, refugees, older persons, children and women, have been introduced. While these developments reflect progressive momentum and a clear intention to align with international standards, they simultaneously expose deep-seated gaps that threaten to undermine the full realization of these groups' fundamental rights.

Vulnerable groups are segments of the population that face a higher risk of discrimination, harm, or disadvantage due to social, economic, physical, or geographic factors, requiring special protection to ensure their rights and well-being.

5.1. Persons with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities include individuals with physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that may hinder full and effective participation in society. The ZHRC acknowledges the Government's efforts to protect the rights of PWDs through the ratification of regional and international instruments such as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Section 83 of the Constitution guarantees rights of PWDs. The ZHRC notes that the Persons with Disabilities Act number 3 of 2025, aligns with the CRPD and Africa Disability Protocol. Despite this progress, PWDs continues to face challenges associated with reasonable accommodation, access to healthcare, underfunding of social protection programmes, unequal opportunities, discrimination and stigma.

The ZHRC recommends the GoZ to

- i. Implement the provisions of the newly enacted PWD Act.
- ii. Adequately fund social protection programmes for PWDs.

5.2. Internally Displaced Persons

5.2.1. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are individuals forced to flee their homes due to conflict, disasters, or human rights violations but remain within

their country's borders¹⁵. The ZHRC notes that Zimbabwe is yet to enact specific legislation on IDPs despite ratifying the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention). Therefore, in Zimbabwe, protection of IDPs relies mainly on constitutional rights and collaboration with humanitarian actors, but lacks formal legal safeguards, compensation mechanisms, and institutional coordination. The Commission reaffirms that this gap remains a priority for reform. The ZHRC also notes that some internal displacements in Zimbabwe are driven by natural disasters, developmental projects, land disputes and arbitrary evictions.

5.2.2. In 2025, the ZHRC responded to human rights concerns related to IDPs. These include the Cloverdale evictions, displacements in mining communities such as Hurungwe, Buhera, Seke and Bikita among others. The human rights concerns noted include lack of consultations, compensation and prior informed consent, loss of livelihood opportunities, violation of cultural sites, lack of decent alternative accommodation and in some instances dismantling the family unit. Furthermore, the ZHRC is concerned that most of its recommendations on IDPs, in its investigations and monitoring reports, have not been fully implemented by the Government.

5.2.3. The ZHRC recommends the GoZ to;

- i. Domesticate the Kampala Convention for the full protection of IDPs.
- ii. Adopt a human rights-based approach to displacement management ensuring fair compensation and relocation.
- iii. Implement recommendations from ZHRC monitoring and investigations reports on IDPs.

¹⁵ www.unhcr.org

5.3. Intersex Persons

5.3.1. Intersex persons are born with sex characteristics (such as sexual anatomy, reproductive organs, hormonal patterns and or chromosomal patterns) that do not fit typical binary notions of male or female bodies¹⁶. They often face human rights challenges regarding their bodily autonomy, and discrimination. In 2025, there were growing calls for the recognition of the human rights of intersex persons, in line with international human rights norms that advocate for non-discriminatory laws and policies, acts of violence and harmful practices against intersex persons. The ZHRC produced a policy brief and advocacy paper on the rights of intersex persons which was well received by various stakeholders, including the Government, Development Partners and CSOs. The GoZ has taken positive steps towards the protection of the rights of intersex persons, which include assessment of the legal and policy gaps and conducting consultative meetings in order to map a way forward in addressing the plight of intersex persons in Zimbabwe.

5.3.2. In addition, the ZHRC notes that, for the first time in Zimbabwe's history, a group of intersex persons filed a High Court application (case number HCH4743/25) against the Government, seeking legal recognition and protection of their rights. They demand the official acknowledgment of intersex persons as a distinct category under Zimbabwean law, including the introduction of a third gender marker on birth certificates, national IDs, and passports, as well as the regulation of non-consensual surgeries on intersex minors.

5.3.3. The ZHRC recommends GoZ to;

- i. Enact legislation that recognizes intersex persons.
- ii. Develop medical guidelines on surgeries for intersex minors.
- iii. Introduce a third gender marker on civil registry documentation.

¹⁶ www.ohchr.org/en/sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity/intersex-people

5.4. Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Irregular Migrants

5.4.1. Refugees, asylum seekers and irregular migrants are persons who move across borders due to persecution, conflict, or economic needs, with refugees having specific protections under international law¹⁷. Zimbabwe's legal framework provides for refugee and asylum seekers under the Refugees Act, although challenges persist in enforcement and access to services. During its monitoring missions, the ZHRC observed that opportunities for decent work and freedom of movement for refugees remain restricted due to legislative barriers. Issues affecting rejected asylum seekers remain unresolved such as the Rwandese and Mozambicans at Tongogara Refugee Settlement. However, the Commission notes the Government efforts to amend the Refugee Act [Chapter 4:03] so as to address these challenges. The ZHRC also participated and made submissions during public consultations on amendment of the Refugee Act. Due to the United States Presidential Executive Orders, funding for programmes at Tongogara Refugee Settlement has drastically reduced thus impacting on human rights such as the right to adequate standard of living, education, identity and freedom of movement (travel documents) and resettlement.

5.4.2. During inspections of various correctional facilities, the ZHRC observed the detention of irregular migrants awaiting deportation thereby exposing them to challenges faced in detention facilities. Most of these individuals are detained for administrative purposes linked to their immigration status rather than committing criminal offences. The ZHRC notes that irregular migrants should be placed in separate holding centres instead of prisons.

5.4.3. The ZHRC recommends the GoZ to;

- i. Expedite amendment of the Refugee Act.
- ii. Establish holding centres for irregular migrants.

¹⁷ www.unhcr.org

5.5. Older Persons

5.5.1. The ZHRC acknowledges the GoZ's efforts to advance the rights of older persons through the ratification of key human rights instruments and enactment of legislation. These include the Constitution, Older Persons Act [Chapter 17:11] and ratification of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Citizens to Social Security and Social Protection and the Protocol on the Rights of Older Persons of the AU protocol, in 2024. In 2025, ZHRC during its monitoring missions noted that older persons continue to face significant challenges due to a weak social protection system and programmes (Assisted Medical Treatment Orders and Harmonised Cash Transfers) which are underfunded.

5.5.2. Further, the ZHRC notes that in 2024, Zimbabwe amended the Pension and Provident Funds Act to strengthen pension security, ensure inflation-proof investments, and introduce stricter governance to protect pensioners' savings from future economic shocks. Despite these reforms, challenges remain, including pension arrears and unresolved historical losses impacting many retired and older citizens. ZHRC commends the Government for ongoing pledge reforms to restore pensioners' dignity and financial security, with additional legislation such as the State Service Pension Bill before Parliament, to modernize pension management and address systemic issues.

5.5.3. The ZHRC recommends the GoZ to;

- i. Fully implement the Older Persons Act by gazetting statutory instruments and introduce the Older Persons Fund.
- ii. Adequately fund social protection programmes for older persons.

5.6. Children

5.6.1. Section 81 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe specifically addresses the rights of children. It guarantees the right of children to be protected from discrimination, exploitation, and abuse, while also ensuring their right to be heard and participate in matters affecting them. Legislative enhancements in 2025, included the proposed enactment of the Child Justice Bill, H.B. 11 of 2021, and Criminal Law Amendment (protection of children and young

persons) Act of 2024, with the aim of promoting children's rights and protection from abuse, violence, and exploitation. Furthermore, the Government reinforced the minimum age of consent at 18 years to protect minors.

5.6.2. The ZHRC is concerned with the resistance and non-cooperation of stakeholders and communities to the re-admission of pregnant girls and teenage mothers into schools. Cases of child marriages continue to be reported despite positive legislative developments.

5.6.3. The ZHRC recommends the GoZ to;

- i. Take an inclusive approach in equitably recognizing and responding to the vulnerabilities of both boys and girls.
- ii. Strengthen enforcement mechanisms that address child labour, exploitation and child marriages.

5.7. Women

5.7.1. Zimbabwe has made considerable progress in integrating gender equality in its legal and policy frameworks to address societal inequalities. Gender equality is one of the founding principles in the Constitution in terms of Section 3 and Section 17. Sections 56 and 80 provides for gender equality, non-discrimination and protection from harmful cultural practices. The ZHRC notes that women continue to face gender-based violence and have also become victims of drugs and substance abuse.

5.7.2. The protection of women has been supported through promote participation in governance and ensure equal access to education and health. Nonetheless, implementation gaps and societal challenges continue.

5.7.3. The ZHRC recommends GoZ to;

- i. Strengthen enforcement mechanisms that address gender inequalities and harmful cultural practices.

- ii. Enact electoral reforms that ensure the 50% quota of women's representation mandated by section 17 of the Constitution in elected positions is realised and ensure its implementation on appointed positions.

6. Other Human Rights Concerns

6.1. Corruption

- 6.1.1. Corruption has adverse effects on enjoyment of human rights and administrative justice. It weakens the capacity of public institutions to deliver essential services, distorts decision-making processes, and undermines the principles of fairness, equality, and accountability. When public resources are diverted or mismanaged, citizens are denied access to health care, education, clean water, housing, and other fundamental rights.
- 6.1.2. The ZHRC acknowledges that the GoZ has put in place mechanisms and legal and policy frameworks to combat corruption. The Constitution provides a solid legal foundation for the rule of law and establishes clear standards for accountability, equality, transparency, and administrative justice. The Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act [Chapter 9:23], criminalizes various corrupt practices, the Public Finance Management (PFM) Act [Chapter 22:19], ensures accountability in the management of public funds and the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets (PPDPA) Act [Chapter 22:23], enhances transparency in government procurement contracts. The Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission (ZACC), investigates allegations of corruption across both public and private sectors and facilitates integrity committees in State entities. The GoZ also established the Anti-Corruption Court to effectively address corruption cases ¹⁸.
- 6.1.3. Zimbabwe is a signatory to the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) that obligates the State to put in place legislative and institutional measures that encourage the reporting of corruption while

¹⁸Governance Reforms Sector Working Group Progress Report <https://zimtreasury.co.zw/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Governance-Reforms-Sector-Working-Group-Progress-Report-SDP-25-November-2-24.pdf>

safeguarding individuals who come forward. A Whistle Blower and Witness Protection Bill, that seeks to protect individuals that give out information regarding illicit activities within organisations, is yet to be passed into law.

6.1.4. The ZHRC notes that this lack of a whistle blower protection law, discourages potential whistle blowers from reporting corruption or abuse of office, particularly in politically sensitive or economically powerful sectors. Additionally, the shrinking civic space weakens investigative journalism, procurement oversight, and public finance transparency.

6.1.5. The ZHRC recommends the GoZ to;

- i. Prioritise the enactment of a Whistle Blower and Witness Protection Bill into law.
- ii. Integrate whistleblower mechanisms into national strategies, with adequate funding and public awareness campaigns.

6.2. Business and Human Rights

6.2.1. The Commission is encouraged by the progress made by GoZ during the period under review in engaging with stakeholders on the development of the Business and Human Rights National Action Plan (BHR NAP). Zimbabwe's approach to business and human rights is shaped by its complex history of structural reform, land redistribution, and governance transitions. The country's rich mineral resources, biodiversity, and human capital remain underutilized due to persistent socio-economic inequalities and governance challenges. These dynamics have contributed to recurrent human rights concerns in sectors such as mining, agriculture, and tourism.

6.2.2. In this regard, ZHRC notes a trend of poor labour conditions, environmental degradation and violations related to land rights and displacement. Notably, arbitrary evictions, which happen without adequate consultation, fair compensation, or alternative livelihood arrangements, lead to the erosion of socio-economic rights and community stability. There is limited access to effective remedies and exclusion of marginalized groups such as women, youth, and persons with disabilities, in the natural resources exploration sector.

6.2.3. ZHRC notes the efforts by the GoZ, through the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) and the Ministry of Mines and Mining Development, in inspecting and regulating mining activities to ensure responsible conduct. Despite these efforts, enforcement remains inconsistent, and violations often go unpunished, highlighting the need for stronger oversight, transparency, and accountability mechanisms.

6.2.4. These operations continue to pose significant risks to water quality particularly in areas where there is intensive gold, chrome, lithium, and granite extraction. The degradation of wetlands has accelerated in recent years due to unregulated construction, sand mining, industrial pollution, and poor enforcement of environmental laws.

6.2.5. Labour rights within the extractive sector have also come under scrutiny. Issues include unsafe working conditions, inadequate occupational health and safety measures, and the exploitation of workers. Many employees operate in hazardous environments without proper protective gear or training, exposing them to health risks. Furthermore, workers' rights to fair wages, reasonable working hours, and access to social protection are frequently compromised.

6.2.6. The ZHRC recommends the GoZ to;

- i. Accelerate efforts towards adopting a National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights.
- ii. Strengthen the enforcement of Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) for development projects as effective instruments of environmental protection, rather than mere documentation as they have often become.

6.3. Human Rights Defenders

6.3.1. According to the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), human rights defenders are persons who individually or with others act to promote and protect human rights in a peaceful manner. These include human rights activists, journalists, lawyers, members of CSOs who act in their professional capacity, and individuals. The ZHRC acknowledges that the country has a progressive Constitution that

guarantees the exercise of freedoms of expression, association and assembly.

6.3.2. However, ZHRC, notes with concern, the shrinking civic space that has been witnessed through the arrest of human rights defenders. The ZHRC is concerned with the prolonged pre-trial detention that this particular group is subjected to and urges the Government to ensure that the absolute right to a fair trial is upheld and that there is no discrimination in the treatment of arrested persons. ZHRC further notes with concern, the passing of the Private Voluntary Organizations (PVO) Act [Chapter 17:05], in that the implementations of some of the provisions therein have an effect of further shrinking the civic space.

6.3.3. The ZHRC recommends the GoZ to;

- i. Continue creating a conducive operating environment for CSOs and human rights defenders
- ii. Enact a law on protection of human rights defenders.

6.4. Drug and Substance Abuse

6.4.1. Drug and substance abuse has significant implications on the enjoyment of human rights, as it affects individuals' rights to health, dignity, safety, and social participation. Abuse of substances lead to health deterioration, mental health issues, and increased vulnerability to violence and exploitation, thereby compromising the right to health and security.

6.4.2. Punitive approaches in dealing with drug abuse, such as forced detention or criminalization violates personal liberty and dignity, especially where the treatment was coercive and inhumane. Drug and substance abuse is perpetuating social stigma and discrimination, limiting affected individuals' access to education, employment, and community participation, which infringes on the rights to equality and non-discrimination. ZHRC notes that these challenges, require a rights-based approach highlighting voluntary treatment, protection from abuse, social inclusion and policies that respect the dignity and autonomy of individuals struggling with addiction.

6.4.3. ZHRC recommends the GoZ to:

- i. Implement rights-based drug treatment and rehabilitation programs.
- ii. Enforce strict regulation and accountability in rehabilitation centres.
- iii. Strengthen measures to curb drug and substance supply into communities.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1. The year 2025 presented a complex and multifaceted human rights landscape for Zimbabwe, characterized by significant legislative and institutional progress alongside some noted challenges. On one hand, the Government of Zimbabwe has demonstrated a commendable commitment to aligning itself with international and regional human rights standards. The historic abolition of the death penalty, the ratification of key instruments such as the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers, and active engagement with reporting mechanisms such as the Universal Periodic Review and the African Commission, signal a positive intent for re-engagement and reform. Judicial oversight that struck down repressive provisions of the "Patriotic Act" and ongoing legislative processes for a National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights and the Persons with Disabilities Act are further testaments to this progressive trajectory.

7.2. However, this report demonstrates that a gap remains between legal frameworks and the lived reality for many Zimbabweans. The promise of the Constitution is yet to be fully realized as concerns of shrinking civic space, enactment of the PVO Act and the arbitrary arrest and prolonged detention of human rights defenders, journalists, and activists, political intolerance and the unconstitutional restrictions to peaceful demonstrations continue to create a climate of fear and inhibit the work of civil society. The underfunded healthcare system, lack of clean water, and failure to provide free and compulsory basic education, continue to violate the economic and social rights of citizens, perpetuating cycles of poverty. Moreover, the plight of the vulnerable groups, remain disproportionately affected by lack of specific, enforceable legislation and adequate social protection, leaving them

exposed to discrimination and harm. The non ratification of the UN Convention Against Torture and its Optional Protocol, the UN Convention Against Forced Disappearances, the UN Convention Against Statelessness, and the African Union Convention on Ending Violence Against Women (AU-CEVAWG) also impede the good progress Zimbabwe has made in fulfilling its international human rights obligations.

- 7.3. There is need for adequate resource allocation to the affected sectors, and unwavering accountability. The Government must move beyond ratification to domestication and implementation of policies and laws. The Commission urges all stakeholders, that is, the Government, CSOs, the judiciary, and the international community, to collaborate in closing the implementation gap and building a Zimbabwe where the comprehensive and inalienable human rights enshrined in the Constitution are not merely an aspiration, but a daily reality for all.