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Ex-Commissioners reflect on ZHRC tenure

Outgoing ZHRC Commissioners have described their experiences at the Commission as priceless and would not hesitate to take up offers to showcase these in regional and international human rights fora.

Four Commissioners, Japhet Ndabeni-Ncube, Kwanele Muriel Jirira, Dr. Joseph Kurebwa and Dr. Ellen Sithole who was the Deputy Chairperson retired from the Commission on 7 May 2020 after completing the mandatory two five-year terms as spelt out in the Constitution of Zimbabwe.

Dr Sithole said she was honoured to serve as Deputy Chairperson of the Commission and went on to pay tribute to fellow Commissioners, Parliament, CSOs, Development Partners, Regional and International NHRIs as well as the dedicated Secretariat.

"It was a challenging experience and there were many teething problems but by God's grace I endured and, together with my fellow Commissioners, we managed to ensure that the ZHRC became operational...I personally benefited from the support and encouragement of the first



Outgoing Deputy Chairperson, Dr Ellen Sithole



Outgoing Commissioner Kwanele Muriel Jirira



Outgoing Commissioner Japhet Ndabeni-Ncube



Outgoing Commissioner Dr Joseph Kurebwa

Chairperson of the ZHRC (Prof Reg Austin) and the current Chairperson (Dr E H Mugwadi)," said Dr Sithole.

A former University of Zimbabwe Law Lecturer, Dr Sithole said she will be retracing her footsteps to her academic career but was quick to add,

"I would still want to serve in the human rights arena at regional (African) level and/or international level. I think they would benefit from my valuable experience at ZHRC."

Bulawayo-based former Commissioner, Japhet Ndabeni-Ncube said the creation of ZHRC was the

best thing to have happened to Zimbabwe, describing its mandate as 'beautiful'.

He explained,

"One thing that pushed us to perform was our dedication. We were forward-looking, whatever the difficulties we faced. I am sure we contributed a lot by laying the foundation of the Commission."

Commissioner Ndabeni-Ncube said he had done his best in life and now looks forward to a peaceful retirement. He will, however, continue to offer advice

Ex-Commissioners reflect on ZHRC tenure

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to organisations that are into human rights because he firmly believes that people's rights always have to be respected.

Another Commissioner, Commissioner Jirira is now into Gender and Women's Rights consul-

tancy.

ZHRC is now left with only four out of nine Commissioners following the retirement of the quartet and one other Commissioner, Professor Carroll Themba Khombe who resigned in 2018.

ZHRC is forever grateful to the outgoing Commis-

sioners for their immense contribution towards the establishment of the Commission and wishes them well in life. The Commission looks forward to the appointment of new Commissioners since Parliament conducted interviews of prospective Commissioners on the 3rd of July 2020.

Retention of 'A' Status top priority for new Executive Secretary

The newly-appointed Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission Executive Secretary, Ms Delis Mazambani, assumed office on 17 February 2020, replacing Dr Makatsa Makonese who left the Commission in 2019.

Ms. Mazambani joined the ZHRC at a critical time when the Commission is reviewing its 2015

-2020 strategy. It is her fervent desire to guide the Commission in the development of a new strategic framework which takes cognisance of the various local and global dynamics such as the COVID-19 pandemic which has made virtual programming and e-governance the 'new normal'.

Since ZHRC is due for its second assessment for legitimacy, effectiveness and credibility by the Global Alliance for National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI), the Executive Secretary has committed herself to ensure that the Commission retains the 'A Status' which it was accorded in May 2016 by GANHRI.

Ms Mazambani (left) taking oath of office before the Chairperson of the Commission as required by the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission Act



ZHRC in massive Covid-19 campaign

The Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) has joined forces with the Government of Zimbabwe and private players to fight against the Covid-19 pandemic by coming up with a robust and holistic strategy.

The strategy involves numerous awareness-raising programmes, monitoring visits and attending to complaints that are Covid-19 related targeting the entire populace, including the most vulnerable. This follows the declaration of the pandemic as a global health emergency by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on 30 January 2020.

In terms of awareness-raising, programmes were broadcast on national radio and television. Talkshows were broadcast on ZBCTV programme, Mai Chisamba Show tackling human rights issues in the context of Covid-19 and various constraints being faced by the vulnerable in the wake of the pandemic. In order to fully explore the topics, panelists were drawn from ZHRC, Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP), Ministry of Information, Media and Broadcasting Services, Department of Social Welfare and the Gender Commission.

The Commission then conducted radio discussion programmes on Skyz Metro FM, Star FM and Radio Zimbabwe. Among the issues discussed were the rights being affected by Covid-19.

Radio and television commercials on the virus whose message centres on safeguarding the right to health and right to life are regularly being aired on national and community broadcasting stations.

The Commission continues to conduct Covid-19 Outreach Meetings in different parts of the country accompanied by the distribution of IEC material.

In addition, the Commission is now making quite a number of monitoring visits in some parts of the country although initially, verification of facts on the ground was hampered by the Covid-19 lockdown which made movement impossible. Areas visited so far, are Zvimba, Chegutu, Buhera, Masvingo, Zhombe, Nyanga and Bindura, among others. In all instances, the Commission will be making various recommendations to responsible authorities.

A visit to the farming communities in Chegutu highlighted the dire need of food and water with Radion, KHB and Wicklow communities now surviving on locusts. There is also need to have accessible basic healthcare facilities in these communities since Chegutu District Hospital is kilometres away and patients cannot afford consultation fees, let alone prescribed drugs.

ZHRC has found out that persons in places of detention such as prisons, police cells, mental institutions, homes for children, persons with disabilities and older persons, faced extra vulnerability and risk of infection by the coronavirus because of prolonged confined conditions. The Commission's advice to relevant authorities is that they ensure the provision of adequate protective clothing, thermos-scanners, sanitisers, disinfectants and water which has been a perennial challenge in most of these facilities. There is also

need to stop the sharing of utensils in these isolation centres as this may result in the spread of the disease.

As a result of the awareness raising and monitoring activities, increasing Covid-19 related complaints are being received and attended to by the Commission's human rights teams. These range from lack of masks, sanitisers as well as food and water to harassment of the public by members of the security sector enforcing the lockdown. The harassment took place mostly at roadblocks and in communities such as Chitungwiza and Epworth when people were found moving around. Cases of alleged bribery have also been reported in instances where travellers were intercepted without clearance letters for travelling during the covid-19 induced lockdown.

(Below) Members of the ZHRC Secretariat speaking on 98.4 FM radio in Gweru and some of the material being used by the Commission for the Covid-19 awareness-raising campaign.



ZHRC protecting rights of indigenous minorities



File photo: Special Interest Groups Thematic Working Group members

In April 2020, the Commission successfully appealed for food aid from the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare on behalf of the San Community from Matabeleland North and South. The Commission wrote to the Ministry on

17 April 2020 and a few weeks later, members of the Tsholotsho and Plumtree San Communities had been assisted.

In a letter to ZHRC dated 26 May 2020, the Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare Permanent Secretary, Mr Simon Masanga acknowledged the role of the Commission in protecting human rights.

“We appreciate and respect your constitutional mandate. As such, the Ministry and my leadership is committed to swiftly respond to any distress calls. Please never hesitate to bring to the attention of the Ministry any issues that you feel need attention,” he

said.

Not only did the Ministry provide food aid to the distressed but went a step further and presented blankets to the elderly.

Members from the affected communities confirmed receiving the much-needed support saying that no discrimination was experienced during the distribution process.

However, the villagers are now appealing to the Commission to liaise with the Ministry of Youth, Sport, Arts and Recreation to assist them in setting up youth projects as the San youth are marginalised in this respect.

Commission intensifies its human rights promotion work



A shop owner proudly displays the ZHRC poster during the Covid-19 awareness outreach in Chinhoyi in June 2020.

ZHRC is intensifying its human rights promotion work. Human rights promotion includes training and public awareness on human rights issues, which is necessitated by low levels of human rights by citizens. Some citizens have misconceptions about human rights, with some equating human rights with political rights or women’s rights, due to limited human rights awareness. One

middle-aged man from Chinhoyi, Mashonaland West Province admitted, “When I first saw you coming while holding posters, I was wondering whether you had already started to educate us about the 2023 general elections. Alas, I was wrong. I am ashamed that I didn’t know human rights included the right to health and the right to life.”

Commission work in Pictures...

(Right) The UN Inter-Agency team that was in Zimbabwe from 2-10 March 2020 had a meeting with the Commission. The objective of its mission was to engage with Government and Stakeholders to ensure a more effective, coherent and comprehensive UN system wide support to Zimbabwe. Here, members pose for the camera at the end of the meeting.



(Below) Children's Rights Thematic Working Group (TWG) Chairperson, Commissioner Pastor Petunia Chiriseri (centre, wearing a blue and black outfit) captured in a photograph with members of the TWG in early 2020.

(Below) Mr Misheck Bulu, a ZHRC Human Rights Officer addresses community members on Covid-19 in Epworth.



(Below) Participants at a ZHRC-GALZ engagement meeting held in Gweru earlier this year.



(Above) Mr Trust Siphuma, a Human Rights Officer displays a poster during the Covid-19 campaign.



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Protect, Promote & Enforce Human Rights

VISION

A Zimbabwean society where human rights and administrative justice are fully enjoyed by everyone.

MISSION

To be an effective, fearless, and independent national human rights institution for the advancement of human rights, that is committed to the protection, promotion and enforcement of human rights and administrative justice in accordance with the Constitution of Zimbabwe and International Human Rights Standards.

CORE VALUES

- Fearlessness
- Accessibility
- Independence
- Responsiveness
- Professionalism
- Integrity

COVID-19 ALERT

ZHRC
ZIMBABWE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
For Human Dignity

Safeguard Your Right to Health, Safeguard Your Right to Life.

Comply with Lawful Instructions, Rules and Regulations.

Lodge your complaints to ZHRC and other service providers

Wash your hands

Maintain Social Distancing

Wear a face mask

No Gatherings

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Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission Protect, Promote and Enforce Human Rights