

**ZIMBABWE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION (ZHRC) STATEMENT ON THE CURRENT SITUATION IN ZIMBABWE IN THE WAKE OF THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC**

1. Firstly, the ZHRC takes this opportunity to acknowledge the bold decisions and actions by the Government of Zimbabwe in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular the Head of State and Government has demonstrated leadership by implementing the current 21 – day lockdown across the entire country. This intervention is considered to be an effective measure to slow the spread of the Corona virus and protect people in the country from infection and consequent illness. In spite of the inevitable limitation of enjoyment of some rights, continued national cooperation in mitigating the effects of the pandemic is of paramount importance.

2. The Commission also commends the Zimbabwean society for the unity of purpose in fighting the pandemic. The Government is leading through the national strategy and guidelines to manage the pandemic. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Faith Based Organisations (FBOs), opposition political parties and many other stakeholders and opinion leaders have expressed support and cooperated with these initiatives.

3. Private sector organisations have made timely interventions through donations of critical supplies and equipment to fight the pandemic and the ZHRC takes this opportunity to acknowledge these efforts and appeal for more organisations to come on board.

4. The Government has intensified and strengthened communication channels to raise awareness and share important updates in line with Section 62 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe. The utilisation of a wide range of communication platforms including radio, television, print media, social media as well as Government provincial and district response structures is commendable. The

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use of different languages including sign language is also appreciated although more could be done to reach out to marginalised communities which may not have access to these conventional communication methods.

5. The ZHRC encourages the Government of Zimbabwe to pay more attention to the following areas and address related gaps:

i. According to the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation Television (ZBC TV) updates only 194 suspected cases had been tested by 30 March 2020. This number is too small given that there are thousands of people who arrived into the country since the outbreak, some of them from high risk countries and regions. This means that our national statistics may not be very accurate.

ii. There is concern on the slow pace of decentralisation of testing facilities to all provinces. By now provinces should have been sharing daily updates of their tested cases and the respective results so that the nation has a holistic picture of the situation.

iii. The market is getting flooded with “new” products that are surfacing including sanitisers, disinfectants and masks. The risk of fake and ineffective products on the market is very high thereby exposing unsuspecting members of the public to dangers of infections. All supplies must be tested by experts and only certified products should be allowed on the market.

iv. While electricity supply has stabilised in most areas the water situation is still dire. Urgent short to medium term solutions must be put in place to ensure enjoyment of the right to clean, safe and potable water. There is also need to minimise congestion at communal water points since non-observance of social distancing can lead to the rapid spread of the Corona virus.

v. Members of the public should have access to contact details of local COVID-19 response centres including health facilities for easier access to information and health services as well as for purposes of coordination during this crisis period.

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vi. In crisis situations like what is currently obtaining, there is need to observe principles of equality and non-discrimination since specific vulnerable groups need extra care and support. The Department of Social Services should be resourced to ensure that such vulnerable households, institutions, and even communities receive critical relief assistance. This is particularly urgent since a lot of livelihood activities have been disrupted by the pandemic.

vii. Lastly, law enforcement agents should be guided by the human rights based approach in performing their duties and responsibilities. Peaceful maintenance of law and order is encouraged.

Please note that this statement by the ZHRC has been informed by media reports and periodic reports by line ministries as opposed to the Commission's preferred approach of verifying facts on the ground. The use of secondary sources of information has been necessitated by the current limiting circumstances.

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