

## **PRESS STATEMENT BY ZGC ON THE COVID-19 LOCKDOWN**

The Zimbabwe Gender Commission (ZGC)<sup>1</sup> supports the directive issued by President Emmerson Mnangagwa on 27 March 2020 for a 21-day National Lockdown starting from today (Monday 30 March 2020) as part of the measures to control the spread of coronavirus.

Zimbabwe like all countries globally is grappling to address the COVID-19 pandemic, as economies stagnate and resources are diverted to humanitarian emergency, places of work have closed as have schools and universities. While all people are vulnerable and subject to lockdowns, poor people are not able to stockpile supplies and women, due to their daily role in putting food on the table, are sometimes forced to ignore movement restrictions and home has become a different and crowded space. This scenario called for a business unusual approach.

We uphold the efforts of the Government in taking extraordinary measures to stop the spread of COVID-19 infections. The Commission has been closely monitoring all developments and the unfolding gender dimensions obtaining in the context of the COVID-19 response efforts. The Commission would therefore like to highlight the following:

- Call upon all Zimbabweans to adhere to the guidance provided pertaining to the national lockdown and cooperate with security actors that have been deployed. Assuming that said security actors have been trained and are sensitive to gender-responsive approaches to ensuring human security that transcend policing to community support;
- Call upon government to prioritise provision of basic needs of women, children, and persons with disabilities among other vulnerable groups in the spirit of leaving no one behind. Particular attention should be paid to the protection and support to women, men, boys and girls living on the street who may be vulnerable to sexual and other abuse;
- Request that clear guidance be provided to guide movement of citizens such as women's special needs (pregnant and lactating mothers) and the special role that women play in communities through care of the family, sick and children, preparation of food and fetching water;
- Request that clear and specific advice and support be given to women and girls who care for children, the elderly, the sick and other vulnerable groups such as the disabled and may not be able to avoid close contact;
- That women's vulnerability in this context will be increased and this requires that concerted efforts be made to provide social safety nets for indigent groups, develop or update an effective referral pathway and inform key communities and relevant service providers of any such updates;
- That clear reporting mechanisms and measures be put in place to address gender based violence in the public and private space including GBV risk-mitigation measures in quarantine facilities while ensuring women and girl's safety in view of historical vulnerabilities;

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<sup>1</sup>ZGC was established in terms of Section 245 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe and operationalised through the Zimbabwe Gender Commission Act [Chapter 10:31].

- Studies elsewhere are already showing us that levels of domestic violence and sexual exploitation are on the increase due to the increased strain that is presented by COVID-19 where citizens are faced with security, health and money challenges in addition to being confined to their homes;
- Studies also show a negative impact on reproductive health such as costly interruptions to family planning as resources meant for SRHR will be diverted towards the emergency response;
- Women make up most of the informal sector traders and are more likely to be hardest hit economically thus increasing vulnerability to harmful livelihood coping strategies. This is exacerbated by the fact that exempted wholesale and retail shops do not ordinarily cater for the needs of poor and vulnerable people;
- Women constitute a larger proportion of health personnel on the frontlines and any infections will affect negatively their families and children. As such, response priorities should integrate the specific needs of female health personnel.

The Gender Commission therefore calls on Government, private sector and other service providers who are involved to remain cognisant of the gendered implications in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the response measures. Gender expertise should be integrated into response teams that are being deployed to ensure that the needs of women and children are fully considered, among those of other social groups. Lastly, it is critical to ensure equal voice for women in decision making in the COVID-19 response and long-term impact planning.

For more information contact ZGC Chairperson, Margaret Mukahanana Sangarwe 0712214203/0772869214, Chief Executive Officer Virginia Muwanigwa 0712899543/0772327955