



**REMARKS ON THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY (IWD) BY THE  
CHAIRPERSON OF THE ZGC PUBLIC EDUCATION AND  
AWARENESS COMMITTEE: COMMISSIONER N. CHIMBETETE**

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**22 MARCH 2019**

**Salutations**

**Director of Ceremonies, Commissioner S. Mauye,**

**Acting Chairperson of the Zimbabwe Gender Commission, Commissioner  
Dr. Paul Kadzima and Fellow ZGC Commissioners,**

**Representative of disabled Persons in Parliament, Hon Senator Rejoice  
Timire,**

**Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission, Commissioner S.H. Matindike**

**Zimbabwe Republic Police Victim Friendly Unit, Assistant Commissioner  
Bonongwe,**

**Senior Government Officials,**

**Development partners – UN Women, UNDP, ILO, UNICEF, UNFPA**

**Associations of disabled persons,**

**Representatives of the Security sector,**

**Representatives of Civil Society Organisations,**

**Members of the Press here present,**

**Ladies and Gentleman**

It is my honour and privilege to welcome you all to this important event where the Commission joins the world in commemorating this year’s International Women’s Day which is celebrated annually on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March.

The objectives of this dialogue are:

- To raise awareness on the functions of the Commission.
- To identify systemic gender barriers in provision of social protection to persons with disabilities, particularly women and girls.
- To engage relevant Government, Ministries and Departments to share interventions in place.

Let me on the onset share with you the functions of the Zimbabwe Gender Commission. ZGC is one of the five Independent Commissions established in terms of Section 245 of the Constitution and operationalized through the Zimbabwe Gender Commission Act [Chapter 10:31].The Commission is mandated with the overall responsibility of facilitating the promotion of gender equality and equity, as well as ensuring that the gender equality provisions of the Constitution are adhered to. It is also mandated to monitor issues concerning gender equality and provide advice on steps to be taken to ensure gender equality.

The specific functions are:

- To monitor issues concerning gender equality to ensure gender equality as provided for in the Constitution;
- To investigate possible violations of rights relating to gender
- To receive and consider complaints from the public and to take such action as it considers appropriate
- To conduct research into issues relating to gender equality and social justice and to recommend changes to laws and practices which lead to discrimination based on gender;
- To advise public and private institutions on steps to be taken to ensure gender equality;
- To recommend affirmative action programmes to achieve gender equality;

- To recommend prosecution for criminal violations of rights relating to gender
- To secure appropriate redress where rights relating to gender have been violated; and
- To do everything necessary to promote gender equality.

As a Commission, we are aware that persons with disabilities face physical and social barriers that hinder their access to services or employment and prevent them from enjoying their rights coupled with high poverty rates, stigmatisation, marginalisation and limited access to social services such as health, education and labour market participation. We have convened to use this platform to hear their challenges as disabled women to take them forward. We have invited Government Ministries and the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission to respond to the issues you would have raised. It is prudent that through this policy dialogue with duty bearers and rights holders on the responsiveness of social safety nets for persons with disabilities, we come up with recommendations to eliminate challenges faced by disabled women and girls.

Article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, provides that States must “...recognize the right of persons with disabilities to social protection and to the enjoyment of that right without discrimination on the basis of disability, and shall take appropriate steps to safeguard and promote the realization of this right...” The 2018 UN Report on the World Social Situation highlights that social protection can ensure the economic security of persons with disabilities and their families and contribute to creating an enabling environment for their inclusion. Zimbabwe has made strides over the past decades in advancing the rights of persons with disabilities including the enactment of the Disabled Persons Act [Chapter 17.01 of 1992], ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2013, Constitutional provisions on disability (e.g. Sections 22 and 83), emergence of

vibrant disability persons' organisations sector and adoption of inclusive education approaches (UNESCO 2018). However, there have been calls to speed up the revision and enactment of the Act and we appreciate the initiatives by Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association of doing a gender analysis of the Disability Act, which they are going to share with us today.

The 2019 International Women's Day campaign theme is “*Think equal, build smart, innovate for change.*” The theme focuses on innovative ways in which we can advance gender equality and the empowerment of women, particularly in the areas of social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure. Social protection is concerned with protecting and helping those who are indigent, such as the poor and vulnerable, children, women, older people, persons with disabilities, the displaced, the unemployed, and the sick. Further, Goal 1 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) exhorts countries to develop appropriate social protection to serve as a springboard to alleviate poverty among all persons. Social protection plays a key role in realizing the rights of persons with disabilities of all ages, race and gender: providing them with an adequate standard of living, a basic level of income security; thus preventing and reducing unacceptable levels of socio-economic insecurity and deprivation. In line with our Constitutional mandate of addressing systemic barriers to gender equality the Commission has noted that there are policy and programmatic gaps in addressing issues of gender and disability, hence this policy dialogue with duty bearers and rights holders on the responsiveness of social safety nets for persons with disabilities, particularly women.

**Ladies and gentlemen**, persons with disabilities constitute about 7% of Zimbabwe's population (UNICEF, 2013). According to SIDA (2014), disability prevalence for women is higher than that of men (12.9 % versus 9%). The report also states that some surveys show that 34 % of girls with disability and 22 % of boys never attend school, compared with 12 and 8% of non-disabled, which then

translate into low literacy rates and therefore they cannot compete on the job market yet education is a basic human right and it has benefits to families, communities and the society at large. As a result, most of these children, especially the girl child, end up working in the informal sector where there are low incomes and harsh working conditions. The outcomes of this dialogue, with no doubt, will inform the work of the Commission as it endeavours to ensure that men and women have access to and participate on an equal in all spheres of life, taking into consideration their specific needs.

**Ladies and gentlemen**, women with disabilities often face double discrimination first as women, secondly as disabled persons, therefore face a heightened risk of domestic and sexual violence. UNFPA estimates that girls and young women with disabilities face up to 10 times more gender based violence than those without disabilities. Women and girls with disabilities also get little or no access to support services and legal assistance aimed at GBV victims. As a Commission, we call upon Government to design programmes to ensure that persons with disabilities, especial women and girls, are protected from gender based violence and sexual abuse. This helps ensure human dignity for all citizens.

This dialogue is not the last one. We will continue to engage with disabled women through various platforms. If you are discriminated on the basis of gender and disability, feel free to lodge the complaints to the Commission. Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to thank the Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association for funding this event. I wish you a pleasant and successful dialogue and thank you for making the commitment to engage.

I thank you