



PRESS STATEMENT BY ZGC ON ALLEGATIONS THAT THE COMMISSION RECOMMENDED A DRESS CODE POLICY FOR TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

Zimbabwe Gender Commission (ZGC) is an independent Commission established in terms of Section 245 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe and operationalised through the Zimbabwe Gender Commission Act [Chapter 10:31]. One of the Commission's functions, as provided in Section 246 of the Constitution, is to advise public and private institutions on steps to be taken to ensure gender equality as provided for in the Constitution.

Pursuant to our mandate, the Commission is conducting a public awareness program by way of delivering public lectures on sexual harassment at tertiary institutions. In the program, the Commission delivered public lectures at Chinhoyi University of Technology (09/10/19); Women's University in Africa (10/10/19); Harare Polytechnic (10/10/19); Harare Institute of Technology (11/10/19); National University of Science and Technology (15/10/19); Midlands State University (15/10/19); and Zimbabwe Open University (17/10/19).

The objectives of the lectures, seeking to end sexual harassment at tertiary institutions, include to: define sexual harassment and promote the understanding of what is and what is not sexual harassment; equip lecturers and students with knowledge on the subject in order to prevent sexual harassment; increase knowledge about sexual harassment in tertiary institutions environment in order to stop its occurrence; to explain legal and other consequences of sexual harassment; and promote dialogue on sexual harassment.

The content of the lectures encourages all to speak against sexual harassment and makes it clear that socio-cultural and other factors have resulted in an environmental context in which anti-social behaviours such as sexual harassment thrive.

Outlining the functions of the ZGC one of which is to investigate possible violations of rights relating to gender, the Commission has spoken on: gendered cultural expectations; toxic notions of masculinity and femininity in relation to sexuality; definition of sexual harassment; status of sexual harassment in Zimbabwe; legislative framework and gaps; forms of sexual harassment; common places in which sexual harassment occurs; student voices on sexual harassment; why sexual harassment should stop; recommendations and invitation to report sexual harassment, among other violations.

It is from these progressive public lectures that a very unfortunate story was conceived in which the Commission is alleged to have recommended a dress code policy for tertiary institutions ostensibly to curb sexual harassment. While a discussion relating to dress occurred in response to a question by a male lecturer, the response given was in good faith within the specific context. The journalist decided to report out of context, purporting that the ZGC recommended a dress code for tertiary institutions.

The story is very unfortunate as it misrepresents what the Commission stands for. In rebutting the media article, ZGC would want to put the record straight:

- a) ZGC has not recommended a dress code policy in tertiary institutions. As a Commission, we stand for the rights and freedoms conferred by our Constitution including on choice, regarding expression including in the form of dress;
- b) We align with the right to personal security and bodily integrity guaranteed in section 52 of our Constitution and rebut the allegations

written as fact that as an institution we are blaming victims of violence. We dismiss with the contempt it deserves, the excuse that dressing is to blame for violence against women as this is not true. Given that some of the victims of rape are babies in diapers, we condemn unequivocally the lame excuse that sexual violence, in all its forms, is caused by dressing;

- c) We are on record as a Commission, having responded to and taken to task individuals and institutions accused of sexual harassment and we would not propose that perpetrators be protected from justice;
- d) We regret the misrepresentation of the context of the discussion and how this has led to well intended but misplaced stories in the media at the expense of the key message shared that sexual harassment is harmful and should stop. That some journalists have attributed the Commission as the source of the story via Twitter is also indicative of the need to do due verification before forwarding information;
- e) The Commission welcomes any such requests for information on policy positions and remains committed to working with the media, among others, in advancing the gender equality and women empowerment agenda.

For more information, contact the Chairperson to the Commission, Ms Margaret Mukahanana Sangarwe, on 0242-250937