



**REMARKS BY THE ZIMBABWE GENDER COMMISSION
CHAIRPERSON, COMMISSIONER MARGRET MUKAHANANA-
SANGARWE, AT THE 2019 NATIONAL GENDER FORUM,
MUTARE**

21 NOVEMBER 2019

- Director of Ceremonies
- The Deputy Speaker of Parliament Honourable Tsitsi Gezi (MP)
- Minister of State for Provincial Affairs and Devolution, Hon. Dr. Ellen Gwaradzimba,
- Minister of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development, Hon Sithembiso G. Nyoni
- The Provincial Administrator for Manicaland Province,
 - Hon Members of Parliament;
 - Honourable Members of the Women’s Parliamentary Caucus here present;
 - Chief Zimunya
 - Commissioners of the Zimbabwe Gender Commission and other Independent Commissions;
- UN Women Deputy Country Director, Ms Caroline Nyamayemombe

- Political Party Leaders
- Hon Members of Parliament
- United Nations Country team
- OXFAM and other Development Partners,
- Civil Society Organizations
- Media
- Ladies and Gentlemen

It is indeed an honour and privilege for me to stand before you today and give remarks at the occasion of the 2019 National Gender Forum being held in Manicaland Province. On behalf of the Zimbabwe Gender Commission, all delegates and indeed on my own behalf, I would like to express my profound gratitude to you Hon. Resident Minister, for warmly welcoming us in your province.

We are more than happy being in Manicaland, kuno kumakomo, kwana Samanyika. We are however also here in deep sorrow; clouded by memories of Cyclone Idai induced disaster which claimed so many lives. We will forever share this pain and for us, being here is not just a coincidence but also in solidarity with the people and women of Chipinge and Chimanimani districts. The gendered impact of Cyclone Idai cannot be overemphasised as women had to and still bear the brunt of these catastrophes. Though this is not the space to address this, I wish to make a special appeal to encourage government, Non Governmental Organisations, faith-based organisations and the private sector to continue offering support to the affected people giving them hope that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment, they will rise again and live the true meaning of a normal life.

Before I go on any further, allow me to extend my sincere appreciation to the office of the Speaker of Parliament, represented by the Deputy Speaker, for honouring our invitation.

In the same vein, I also wish to thank the executive committee members of the Zimbabwe Women Parliamentary Caucus who are here with us today. We are humbled by your consistency in participating in our Annual National Gender Fora and cherish the long standing cordial relations that we have.

Honourable Members of Parliament, councillors, politicians, leaders of political parties and civil society organisations and the community of Mutare, we greatly thank you for attending this National Gender Forum. We know this is towards the end of the year where every organisation has tight schedules to wrap up the year but you have committed to be here. This is clear testimony of your commitment to the cause of gender equality in the Country.

While I am convinced that most of you are aware of the role and mandate of the Zimbabwe Gender Commission, for the benefit of those who are not aware, allow me to briefly share. The Commission is one of the five Independent Commissions established in terms of Sections 232 (c) and 245 of the Constitution and operationalised through the Gender Commission Act [Chapter 10:31]. The overall responsibility of the Commission is to facilitate the promotion of gender equality and equity, as well as ensuring that the gender equality provisions of the Constitution are adhered to. The Commission has the following specific functions:

- a) to monitor issues concerning gender equality to ensure gender equality as provided in the Constitution;

- b) to investigate possible violations of rights relating to gender;
- c) to receive and consider complaints from the public and to take such action in regard to the complaints as it considers appropriate;
- d) to conduct research into issues relating to gender and social justice, and to recommend changes to laws and practices which lead to discrimination based on gender;
- e) to advise public and private institutions on steps to be taken to ensure gender equality;
- f) to recommend affirmative action programmes to achieve gender equality;
- g) to recommend prosecution for criminal violations of rights relating to gender;
- h) to secure appropriate redress where rights relating to gender have been violated; and
- i) to do everything necessary to promote gender equality

Ladies and Gentlemen

Although hosting of the Annual National Gender Forum is mandatory and provided for in the Zimbabwe Gender Commission Act, I however, want to highlight that the Forum is not just a routine event, but a '*National Platform*' for the Gender sector to reflect on achievements, challenges and lessons learnt; form strong coalitions; explore practical ways to transform gender and power relations; and to take the gender agenda forward.

Hon Speaker, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This 2019 National Gender Forum is being held under the theme “*Consolidating the Strategies: Laying the Roadmap for Getting to 50:50*”.

The main objectives of this Forum are to:

- Take stock of progress in the implementation of 2018 Gender Forum Call to Action and recommendations.
- Solicit views and opinions that will guide the Commission's work in entrenching 50/50.
- Develop a roadmap for getting to 50/50 in the 2023 harmonised elections and beyond

The Forum comes at the backdrop of three emerging issues that we need to deliberate on, agree and direct our actions going forward:

- i) We are all aware that the women’s quota provided for in the Constitution and the Electoral Act is lapsing by 2023;
- ii) Cabinet has made a proposal to extend the women's quota by another 10 years and set a youth quota at 10 individuals; and
- iii) The need to engender the Electoral Act reform processes currently underway.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The stakeholders at the 2018 National Gender Forum tasked the Commission to take leadership in ensuring the integration of constitutional and electoral reforms to ensure the achievement of 50/50 in the 2023 harmonized elections. Our discussions for the next two days are therefore not happening in a vacuum, as they build upon extensive debate, many consultations and engagements

that the ZGC and its stakeholders have been engaged in, as shall be elaborated by our CEO in the next presentations.

These processes and activities have laid the ground work and provide a basis for our discussions at this forum through proffering recommendations for consideration as options and methodologies to guarantee equal representation of women in politics and decision making.

I am aware that we have divergent views regarding the options and methodologies, but as we discuss, let's bear in mind that 50/50 as a result, is a constitutional requirement. **Section 17** of the Constitution provides that "the state must promote gender balance to ensure that women fully participate in all the various spheres of Zimbabwean society." **Section 56** guarantees gender equality and non-discrimination while **Section 80(1)**: provides that every woman has full and equal dignity of the person with men and this include equal opportunities in political, economic and social activities.

The call for equal representation in politics is also in line with the international and regional normative frameworks to which Zimbabwe is a signatory, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Beijing Declaration, SADC Protocol on Gender and Development and the Maputo Protocol.

Zimbabwe has also prioritized implementation of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality. Target 5.5 call for

equal opportunities (50/50) for leadership at all levels of decision-making.

Without being prescriptive of the options and methodologies, I would want us to be open minded and think beyond the current quota system, considering that, despite us having the quota since 2013, women in Zimbabwe still find themselves under represented in politics. In fact, we seem to have lost earlier gains, if statistics showing women making up only 31.5% of the National Assembly, 48% of the Senate, and 13.3% councillors are indicative. The reasons for this under representation are well known.

Central to this is the patriarchal nature of our society which breeds various stereotypes against women and girls. Leadership, notably politics is deemed culturally a male domain, and so, there are still psychological and institutional hurdles to overcome. The economic marginalisation of women also prevents a lot of them from participating in politics which has been highly commercialised.

Violence against women is also pervasive in the political arena. Women will not equally contest in elections as long as the environment is marred with violence in all its forms.

We also need to interrogate political party processes in terms of guaranteeing women's participation within political party's internal decision making structures. Women participation in electoral processes must begin with gender sensitive and responsive political party policies, structures and outcomes in compliance with the constitution.

Our deliberations at this forum should therefore interrogate and propose measures/methodologies which can address these gender barriers and guarantee gender equality broadly in accordance with the Constitutional dictates particularly looking at the achievement of 50/50 for both the National Assembly and Local Government.

Let me also reiterate that the Zimbabwe Gender Commission as a constitutional body whose key mandate is to monitor issues concerning gender equality and ensure realisation of gender equality as provided in the Constitution, we continue to strive for the ultimate achievement of 50/50 and we are convinced that it is achievable and the Commission will leave no stone unturned until it is done. This will however call for collaborative efforts by all stakeholders and *the road map for the journey we are to travel in getting to 50-50 should be drawn at this Forum.*

The action plan and road map should define actions specific to critical stakeholders such as political parties, parliament, government, National Human Rights Institutions and Civil Society Organisations among others. We have invited all these stakeholders involved so that they share their perspectives and recommendations on possible options and issues to incorporate into the action plan.

As I conclude, I would like to express our sincere appreciation to the Government of Zimbabwe and to our partners, Oxfam and HIVOS for the financial and technical support towards the hosting of this Forum. We also acknowledge the efforts of civil society organisations in mobilising their members to participate at this Forum. Particular mention goes to WIPSU and Women's Coalition of

Zimbabwe who have supported the participation of women from across the 10 provinces.

My parting words are that as women let us be the chief architects of equality, as power will never be given to us on a silver platter, we have to claim it!! I always reflect upon the acceptance speech of Nobel peace prize winner, President Johnson Sirleaf who called for the women of the world to rise up against patriarchy as she said: "My sisters, my daughters, my friends, find your voice ".

I THANK YOU