



KEYNOTE ADDRESS ON THE 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER BASED VIOLENCE BY
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ZIMUNYA – MANICALAND PROVINCE

20 NOVEMBER 2019

It is my honour and privilege as the Chairperson of the Zimbabwe Gender Commission to welcome you all to this event as we commemorate the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence. We are particularly happy as a Commission that this is the first time we are commemorating the event in a rural setting.

The Zimbabwe Gender Commission, is one of the five Independent Commissions established in terms of Sections 232 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 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

The 16 days of activism against gender based violence (GBV) is a global campaign dedicated to ending gender-based violence. The world commemorates 16 days of activism against gender based violence from 25 November to 10 December annually.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are celebrating the 16 days under the UN theme *“Orange the world: Generation Equality Stands against Rape.”* The colour orange symbolizes a brighter future, free of violence. It also serves as a means of demonstrating solidarity in eliminating all forms of violence. The specific objectives of this commemoration are to:

- To raise awareness on the extent of GBV and other harmful cultural practices such as child marriages.
- To explain legal and other consequences of GBV.
- To stand in solidarity with victims and survivors of gender based violence.

Gender-based violence is violence that is directed at an individual based on his or her biological sex or gender identity. It includes physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and psychological abuse, threats, coercion, and economic or educational deprivation, whether occurring in public or private life. Examples include intimate partner violence including physical violence, sexual violence including rape, forced and early marriages.

These abuses take place in our homes, communities, educational institutions, work places and the church. According to the 2015 Zimbabwe Demographic Health Survey, 1 in 3 women (35%) aged 15 to 49 have experienced physical violence and about 1 in 4 women have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15. According to UNICEF, 22 women are raped daily in Zimbabwe, one woman is abused every 75 minutes, an average of 646 women being sexually abused monthly and one in three girls is raped or sexually assaulted before they reach the age of 18. Further cases of rape have increased from 4 450 in 2010

to 8 069 in 2018. What is saddening is the increase in rape cases of minors. These statistics are indeed frightening and calls for urgent action to pass deterrent jail sentences for perpetrators of sexual offences.

The Commission is also concerned by the increase in child marriages in the country. According to UNFPA 2013, married young girls are at higher risk of sexual and domestic violence at the hands of their husbands than women who marry later. Child marriages prevent girls from obtaining an education, maturing, and ultimately choosing their own life partners. In addition, child marriages increase the risk of cervical cancer and pregnancy poses many challenges for these young girls. In a research that we conducted titled **“The role of the Zimbabwe Gender Commission in ending child marriages”** we noted that the prevalence rate of child marriages is high in Manicaland Province at 30%. In the same research, negative religious practices and harmful cultural practises were identified as causes of child marriages. It is our hope that this gathering today will be a call to action for us all as traditional leaders, religious leaders and as a community at large to say NO to child marriages!!

As a Commission we are concerned that despite enactment of the Domestic Violence Act and despite having Sections 51, 52 and 53 of the Constitution explicitly providing for the right to dignity, personal security and freedom from inhuman and degrading treatment, cases of gender based violence continue to escalate.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Commission is also concerned with inadequate service provision for survivors of GBV which include access to justice, health and psycho-social support. We urge the Government to compliment the work that Non-Governmental Organisations are doing by establishing Government run shelters throughout the country. The Commission will continue to engage Government and other stakeholders in a bid to

enact a legal framework which provides for stiffer and deterrent penalties which include mandatory sentencing for rape and other related sexual offences. We also urge the Government to urgently align the marriage laws to the constitutional provision for minimum age of marriage which is 18 years.

In conclusion I call upon all survivors of GBV to report to the Zimbabwe Republic Police or to the Zimbabwe Gender Commission or any other institutions which can offer the necessary assistance. The message against GBV and child marriages should continue to ring loud in our lives even after these 16 days of activism against GBV.

I thank you.