

STATEMENT 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER BASED VIOLENCE 2020

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]. The work of the Commission revolves around promoting, protecting and advancing gender equality as provided for in the Constitution of Zimbabwe.

The Commission joins the world in commemorating 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence. The campaign runs from the 25th of November – itself the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, to the 10th of December – the Human Rights Day. This is a period to highlight, appreciate and honour efforts and sacrifices, by individuals and institutions, towards prevention and elimination of all forms of Gender Based Violence (GBV) in general and violence against women and girls in particular.

This commemoration period is a time and an opportunity for individuals and institutions, working towards eliminating GBV and all other forms of violence against women and girls, to come together, reflect and consolidate past achievements and chart the best way forward. It is indeed an opportunity to share notes to increase awareness and galvanise advocacy efforts towards eliminating GBV and all forms of sexual violence against women and girls.

The year 2020 is momentous as it marks not only the 30th anniversary of the commemorations but also 25 years of the adoption of the historic Beijing Platform for Action (1995). This year's theme – *“Orange the World: Fund, Respond, Prevent, Collect!”* – is very relevant under the obtaining Covid-19 induced situation. The theme is thus a clarion call to:

- **Fund** – mobilise and avail adequate financial resources to all organisations working for the prevention and elimination of all forms of GBV and violence against women and girls.
- **Respond** – ensure that there is a solid response mechanism to react and deal with GBV. The idea is to make sure that all cases, including potential cases, of GBV are attended to satisfactorily.
- **Prevent** – declare zero tolerance for GBV by adopting robust measures to reduce GBV and violence against women to the lowest possible levels.
- **Collect** – gather all data on GBV and all forms of sexual violence with a view to constantly improve services to meet survivor-centred and ethical safety standards.

The advent of the Covid-19 pandemic and the obtaining lockdown measures exacerbate key risk factors in the form of unemployment and loss of income, economic and social insecurity and lack of access to essential support services among others. Confined living conditions in which victims are locked-up together with predators and perpetrators also leads to the increase in GBV and violence against women and girls. And the fact that specialist support services such as shelters, safe houses, rape clinics and other crisis centres are closed during lockdown, makes the situation even worse.

It is imperative to emphasise that GBV and violence against women and girls was already a global problem well before the Covid-19 pandemic. For a very long time now, the world has been struggling to end GBV in all its manifestations including marital rape and intimate partner violence, child marriages, sexual harassment, virginity testing, genital mutilation, name calling and body-shaming among others. Indeed GBV has been common in our homes, in educational institutions, in the streets and other public spaces such as recreational centres, at work places and even in churches.

However, it is encouraging to note that in these 30 years, Zimbabwe has registered milestone achievements including, among others:

- A Constitution with elaborate and comprehensive provisions for the right to dignity, personal security and freedom from inhuman and degrading treatment (Section 51 and Section 52),
- Adoption of international standards and best practices as provided in international and regional instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Sustainable Development Goals, the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa,
- Enactment of the Domestic Violence Act as well as the establishment of the Anti-Domestic Violence Council,
- A National Gender Policy with a dedicated thematic area on Gender Based Violence.

While all these steps are indeed progressive and commendable, the Commission would like to take this opportunity to:

- Call upon Government to speed up the enactment of a comprehensive legislative framework to deal with SGBV in general and sexual harassment in particular;
- Call upon the judicial system to give punitive and deterrent jail sentences to perpetrators of rape and all other forms of sexual offences including sexual harassment and child marriages, among others;
- Appeal to government and other stakeholders to strengthen GBV response mechanisms such as access to justice, health and psycho-social support;
- Call upon survivors, and the community at large to report all forms of GBV to the police or to the Commission for justice and redress.

ZGC appeals, to all Zimbabweans to follow all health and other guidelines to fight against COVID-19.

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***LET US INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY ACT AND SPEAK OUT AGAINST
GBV!!!***