



Statement on International Day of Persons with Disabilities: 3 December

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.

On the 3rd of December every year, the world commemorates the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD) and Zimbabwe Gender Commission joins the world in observing the IDPD, 2020. The thrust of the occasion, ever since, has always been to protect, promote and advance the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities by way of increasing awareness of the rights, the needs and the situation of persons with disabilities in today's world.

This year's edition marks the 28th anniversary of the IDPD commemorations after it was initially proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1992. The 2020 commemorations are running under the theme; "**Building back better: towards an inclusive, accessible and sustainable post COVID-19 world by, for and with persons with disabilities.**"

The theme has a clear thrust on the implications of natural disasters such as Covid-19 on persons with disabilities. It is common cause that natural disasters and pandemics affect people disproportionately. With Covid-19 wreaking havoc the world over, vulnerable groups, especially persons with disabilities, are the worst affected members of the society.

Hence the 2020 theme of the IDPD is very relevant as it speaks to basic principles of:

1. "**Building back better**" – this is an acknowledgment that there is need to rebuild our lives post Covid-19 pandemic and in that re-structuring exercise, the world has to ensure that the situation of persons with disabilities will be much better than it was before the pandemic.
2. "**Inclusive**" – the call for an all-encompassing approach to life after Covid-19 is an emphasis of the old adage of persons with disabilities that "there is nothing for us without us." In other words, the best interest of persons

with disabilities should be first in every economic, political, social and cultural development.

3. **“Accessible”** – the need to collectively work towards ensuring that persons with disabilities have access to essential services such as infrastructure, information, health care, social protection and employment among others.
4. **“Sustainable”** - that communities must do everything necessary, including pulling resources together, in order to ensure that all activities designed to improve the lives of persons with disabilities must be continue without fail.

Indeed the principles of **INCLUSIVITY, ACCESSIBILITY** and **SUSTAINABILITY** are paramount in the narrative of the rights and needs of persons with disabilities. During the launch of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy in 2019, the world governing body was very clear that “the full and complete realisation of human rights of all persons with disabilities is an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

As a Commission with functions that revolve around vulnerable groups that include women and girls, the rights, the aspirations, the needs and the dreams of persons with disabilities are intertwined with our mandate. There, the Commission would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm the position that socio-cultural, economic and political developments without the interests of persons with disabilities at its centre is unsustainable, inconsequential and unacceptable.

It is imperative to acknowledge that in Zimbabwe, lip service has been paid by all stakeholders on rights of persons with disabilities. The rights, interests and needs of persons with disabilities have not been therefore satisfactorily and adequately addressed. In cases of emergency, like during the Covid-19 pandemic, the situation of persons with disabilities in Zimbabwe became critical as they have been largely overlooked.

It is however encouraging to note that in 28 years, Zimbabwe has registered commendable achievements in improving the lives of persons with disabilities. These include, among others:

- A Constitution with elaborate and comprehensive provisions for the right of persons with disabilities as captured in the founding principles in Section 3 through sections 22, 83, 120, 155 and 157. A

- Adoption of international standards and best practices as provided in international Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).
- The enactment of the Disabled Persons Act as well the establishment of the National Disability Policy.

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

- Call upon Government to expedite the alignment of laws and policies on persons with disabilities with provisions of the Constitution.
- Appeal to government and other stakeholders to do everything necessary and/or possible to further improve the lives of persons with disabilities.
- Call upon all persons with disabilities to remain resolute in demanding the rights of persons with disabilities.

Stay safe, wear your mask or stay at home.

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