

STATEMENT ON THE COUNTRY'S 41ST INDEPENDENCE CELEBRATIONS

Zimbabwe Gender Commission (ZGC) is one of the five independent Commissions created by the Constitution in Chapter 12 to support and entrench human rights and democracy in Zimbabwe. Precisely, ZGC is established in terms of Section 245 of the Constitution and operationalised through the Zimbabwe Gender Commission Act [Chapter 10:31]. The mandate of the Commission, which is captured in Section 246, revolves around protecting, promoting and advancing gender equality as provided for in the Constitution.

Today, the Commission joins the nation in celebrating a special day in the history of this beautiful nation as we commemorate 41 years of independence. The Independence Day is a time to reflect on the sacrifices made by the people of Zimbabwe, the heroes and heroines, towards reclaiming human rights and freedoms. The Independence Day is a time to introspect on where we came from, our prevailing context and where we are going to as a people in terms of human rights and freedoms in our political, economic, social and cultural spheres. The struggle for independence was indeed a struggle for equality, human rights and social justice transcending sex, gender, age, ethnic and other demographic factors.

The area of gender equality, equity and social justice is fundamental in respect of human rights and freedoms. And for that reason, the Zimbabwe Gender Commission takes this day as an opportunity to reflect on the principle and practice of the gender narrative of the country since 1980. The Commission notes that the country has achieved various milestone in gender equality in the last 41 years. And these include:

1. The promulgation of a progressive legal and administrative policy framework to promote gender equality and the rights of women and girls in Zimbabwe. These include the National Gender Policy and Constitutional provisions of Sections 3, 17, 51, 52, 56, 80 among others. The Constitution has clearly outlawed all harmful practices, customs and traditions which have been the major source of gender based discrimination, violence, oppression and exploitation. Until adoption of Constitutional Amendment Act 2013, the then supreme law of the land allowed discrimination in personal and family matters.
2. The establishment of the National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) alongside ZGC which include: National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC), Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) and the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC). As we applaud the Government of Zimbabwe and its people for establishing the NHRIs, we also acknowledge the immense contributions by the women's rights movement in Zimbabwe towards the creation of these noble institutions in general and ZGC in particular.
3. Government also set up the national gender machinery comprising of institutions such as the Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development working closely with Gender Focal Persons in the other line ministries;

Zimbabwe Women Micro Finance Bank, Anti-Domestic Violence Council and ZGC, among others.

4. Adoption, ratification and domestication of various regional and international normative frameworks that seek to protect, promote and advance the rights of women and girls in Zimbabwe. Since 1980, Zimbabwe has ratified a number of regional and international conventions and treaties in an attempt to advance gender equality in the country and provide guidelines and minimum standards. These include, among others:
 - The Sustainable Development Goals which uphold gender equality and women empowerment among other areas;
 - the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
 - the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development
 - the SADC Protocol on Prevention and Eradication of Violence Against Women and Children;

Other specific areas in which women in Zimbabwe have made some significant strides include: constitutional and legal affairs; politics and decision making; economic empowerment (agriculture, mining, tourism, trade); education and training; information, media and cultural; and affirmative action, among others.

However, in terms of constitutional benchmarks on gender equality, Zimbabwe is still a long way off the mark as massive gaps and challenges within the same sectors such that huge disparities still remain in political, economic, social and cultural spheres. It is indeed disheartening to note that 41 years after independence, the country is still struggling with:

- Gender Based Violence (GBV) in all its forms and manifestations which remains not only an outcome of but a cause of further gender inequality. The scourge prevails at both public and domestic spheres;
- Gender discrimination and injustice, especially against women and girls within our socio-economic, political and cultural existence, continue to curtail progress made towards substantive gender equality.
- Persistent systemic barriers to gender equality are ring-fenced and reinforced by patriarchy, socialisation, cultural and religious norms and practices. Most of our systems as a country – especially the political, economic, religious and cultural systems – are heavily embedded by patriarchal norms and practices that perpetuate gender based exploitation, discrimination and oppression.
- Low representation of women in politics and other decision making positions persists despite clear Constitutional provisions on full gender parity. More worrying is the fact that four decades after independence, the representation of and participation of women in decision making positions across all sectors seems to be regressing when they should be increasing to meet Constitutional provisions.
- Lack of inadequate commitment to gender responsive budgeting symbolised by the fact that there has been a general non-adherence to gender budgeting in practice if not in principle within the country's public finance machinery, a culture that has permeated many institutions in the country. This is exemplified by limited funding towards institutions dealing with gender issues including the Commission itself.

- Limited access by women to productive resources such as land, capital and other support services. Land question is arguably the major issue that drove the liberation struggle and it is disturbing to note that 41 years later, women still have such limited access to land despite providing the majority labour in that sector. The hope is that the land audit recommendations will redeem women from this anomaly which became a missed opportunity during the land reform program.
- Lack of proper integration of gender issues in mitigation and response to disaster management. Contemporary events including the Covid-19 pandemic have revealed that the national response system to disasters and pandemics is neither gender sensitive nor inclusive. Although lobbying by representative groups improved attention to gender issues, the deep seated inequalities prevailing remain a major obstacle.

The Commission remains committed to its mandate of ensuring that there is full gender equality in Zimbabwe. As we celebrate the Independence Day, the Commission calls upon Zimbabweans at large to remember that the dreams and aspirations of the women and girls who sacrificed their lives during the liberation struggle were to create a gender-equal society. We call upon all stakeholders to be accountable to the letter and spirit of the constitution and level the playing field through ensuring gender equality and women empowerment.

For more information, contact ZGC Chairperson, Margaret Mukahanana Sangarwe 0712214203/ 0772869214, and Chief Executive Officer Virginia Muwanigwa 0712899543/ 0772327955

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 Zimbabwe Gender Commission

We reiterate our call upon all Zimbabweans to follow all health and other guidelines to fight against COVID-19.

Zimbabwe Gender Commission for Gender Equality