

STATEMENT ON 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER BASED VIOLENCE:2021

The Zimbabwe Gender Commission is one of the five Independent Commissions established in terms of Sections 232(c) and 245 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe and operationalized through the Zimbabwe Gender Commission Act (Chapter 10:31), with the overall mandate of promoting, protecting, and advancing gender equality as provided for in the Constitution of Zimbabwe.

This year marks the 31st anniversary of the 16 days campaign running under the global theme **“Orange the world: End violence against women now”**. The colour orange symbolizes a brighter future, free of all forms of violence in general and violence against women and girls.

The Commission joins the world in commemorating 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence. Violence against women and girls is a global crisis which knows no boundaries of geography or culture. GBV is manifested through a multitude of actions, including forced marriage of young girls, rape and sexual violence, verbal, and physical abuse. These practices are violations of the human rights of the individuals affected. In addition, GBV has significant impact at the individual level, with victims suffering from physical and mental effects, loss of income and increased healthcare costs. Gender based violence also threatens family structures, children suffer emotional damage when they watch their mothers and sisters violated.

In Zimbabwe, while a number of positive outcomes have been seen in combating GBV such as the enactment of the Anti-Domestic Violence Act, the establishment of the Anti-Domestic Violence Council, a gender sensitive Constitution and signing of international treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, among others, the Commission notes with great concern that cases of gender based violence in all its forms continue to escalate. The 2019 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) report shows that 39.4% of adolescent girls and women aged 15-49 have experienced physical violence since age 15 and among females aged 15-49 years, 11.6% had experienced sexual violence in their lives. The Commission also notes with concern the ever-rising cases of child marriages especially in some Apostolic Sects. The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the risk and exposure of women and girls to sexual and gender-based violence.

There is need for collaborative efforts by various stakeholders and individuals towards prevention and elimination of all forms of Gender Based Violence (GBV).

The Commission continues to call for:

- Recognition that the genesis of GBV lies in gender inequality which compromises the balance between the content of our legislative framework, the responsiveness of structures established to ensure prevention, protection, and enforcement against GBV and the norms and values inherent in our cultural beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour. There is need therefore to enact a Gender Equality Act that will enable transformative justice through gender equality and non-discrimination.
- The judicial system to give punitive and deterrent jail sentences to perpetrators of all forms of gender-based violence such as sexual harassment, child marriages, among others.
- Government to speed up the enactment of a comprehensive legislative framework to deal with Sexual Harassment.

- Strengthen data collection and investing in high quality surveys on violence against women and improving measurement of the different forms of violence experienced by women, including those who are most marginalized.
- Research on prevalence of various forms of GBV against women in their diversity, special focus on vulnerable and excluded groups such as women with disabilities, child headed households, elderly women, adolescent young women in the education system, women survivors of politically motivated violence, cyber bullying targets.
- A strong referral support system and safe shelters for victims/ survivors.
- Call upon survivors, and the community at large to report all forms of GBV for justice and redress.
- Call upon male gender champions to amplify and actively work with the women's movement to drive the campaign against gender-based violence.
- Actions against GBV should be mainstreamed in COVID-19 response and recovery activities.

While we continue fighting the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, let us not forget the silent pandemic of violence against women and girls.

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Zimbabwe Gender Commission - For Gender Equality