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**STATEMENT ON THE DAY OF THE AFRICAN CHILD**

**16 JUNE 2023**

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 protecting and promoting gender equality through Public Education, Research, Investigation and Monitoring.

The Commission joins the world in commemorating the Day of the African Child running under the theme “**The rights of the child in the digital environment.**” The event is commemorated every year on the 16th of June to celebrate the children of Africa and calls for serious introspection and commitment towards addressing the numerous challenges facing children, boys and girls, across the continent.

The digital environment is a fundamental part of children’s daily lives and millions of children globally are spending increasing amounts of time online. Technology and digital tools can help children reach their potential. Meaningful access to digital technologies can support children to realize the full range of their civil, political, cultural, economic, and social rights. However, the digital space also presents serious risks, including cyber bullying, sextortion and risks and untenable disruption of innocence through exposure to pornographic and other harmful materials including invasion of their privacy. The rights of every child must thus be respected, protected and fulfilled in the digital environment.

It should be noted that while the digital technology leverages on and feeds into widening of the digital gap among Zimbabweans, it also has potential to address the contextual challenges. Without addressing the adverse socio-cultural and economic and political context facing children, then technology will worsen the situation.

Zimbabwe has adopted a progressive legislative framework, key being the national constitution which recognises, among others, rights of children, the girl child as well as the youth.

In light of the above, the Commission calls upon the Government and relevant stakeholders to:

* Ensure that the objectives of the NDS1 among other instruments are realised.
* Empower children to become confident and competent users of technologies.
* Increase children’s access to and use of digital technology and ensure affordable access to ICTs to facilitate online education and training.
* Build a safe, secure and inclusive digital environment for all children, male and female.
* Regularly review and update practices to take into account changes to technology, changes in use, and consequent changes in risks for children.

For more information, contact Acting ZGC Chairperson, Commissioner Obert Matshalaga 0712832666, or Chief Executive Officer Mrs Virginia Muwanigwa 0712899543/ 0772327955