



**PRESS STATEMENT OF THE ZIMBABWE GENDER COMMISSION
COMMEMORATING THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND THE START OF THE 16 DAYS OF
ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE.**

Zimbabwe Gender Commission (ZGC) commemorates International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the 25th of November which also marks the beginning of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence (GBV).

ZGC joins the global community in commemorating this day serves as a powerful reminder that violence against women and girls remains one of the most pervasive and widespread human rights violations globally, with an estimated 736 million women worldwide subjected to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both, at least once in their lifetime.

The 2024 theme for the UNiTE Campaign running now for many years is “*Towards Beijing +30: UNiTE to End Violence Against Women and Girls*” and calls for continued global commitment to end GBV. The theme ushers in focus on 2025, when the global community will mark the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted in 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. This historic document is considered the "Bill of Rights" for women, providing a comprehensive framework for women’s empowerment and gender equality across 12 critical areas including: poverty; education; health; violence; economy; power and decision-making; environment; armed conflict; media; human rights; the girl child; and institutional mechanisms.

Since discrimination against women epitomises violation against women’s rights to voice, choice and control over their destinies, spotlighting 30 years after the Beijing Declaration is not only timely but a concerted call to accelerate action towards gender equality and non-discrimination across sectors.

Zimbabwe has made notable strides in addressing key areas of the Beijing Declaration: including improving access to education, advancing gender equality in power and decision-making, and implementing laws to combat gender-based violence. The country has prioritized women’s economic empowerment through gender responsive budgeting principle, increasing access to finance and resources such as land, as well as scaling up efforts to prevent maternal mortality and HIV/AIDS.

Efforts continue in poverty alleviation, increasing access to and improving quality of education. Legal reforms to address gender-based violence and improve women's rights have also been done. Another strategy has been adoption of quotas to increase women representation in national and local government. These are however seen as not transformative enough due to persistent inequalities in economic empowerment to bridge the gap between those who have and those who without.

Zimbabwe has a robust legal and constitutional framework that supports the protection of women and girls, including the Constitution of Zimbabwe, which guarantees equality and non-discrimination, personal security, and protection from torture and degrading treatment. The Constitution also obligates the state to take measures to eliminate all forms of gender-based violence, aligning with international commitments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). More recently, the domestication through the 2023 Labour Amendment Act, of the core principles of the ILO Convention on Violence and Harassment in the Workplace 190, is to be commended and operationalised.

The **Constitution of Zimbabwe** includes several key provisions aimed at ensuring gender equality and protecting the rights of women and girls. **Section 2** on the supremacy of the Constitution outlaws any law, custom and practice that does not therefore conform, Section 3 upholds gender equality as a founding value and principle while Section 17 encourages **gender balance** as an objective to ensure equitable participation of women and men in civil and political, economic, and socio-cultural spheres.

Under the Bill of Rights in Chapter 4, Zimbabwe upholds the rights outlined in the Beijing Declaration. **Section 51** upholds right to human dignity, **Section 52** ensures the **right to personal security**, protecting individuals from violence, including gender-based violence. **Section 53** safeguards **freedom from torture** or degrading treatment, including harmful practices such as sexual violence, child marriage or armed conflict. **Section 56** guarantees **equality and non-discrimination**, ensuring that no one is discriminated against on the grounds of sex, gender, or other attributes, as mandatory rights. **Sections 61 and 62** in affirming **freedom of expression and media** as well as **access to information** protects women's right to voice and choice, **Section 67** on **political rights** upholds women's right to representation in power and decision-making cited elsewhere, **Sections 71-73** on **property, agricultural land** and **environmental** rights resonates well with the Beijing Declaration, **Section 75** makes right to **education** mandatory while **Section 76** guarantees right to **health**; **Section 78** upholds women's rights within or upon the dissolution of marriage, providing greatest remedy to harmful patriarchal norms; **Section 80** specifically outlines **women's rights**, guarantees women as a collective group, protection from discrimination. Finally, **Section 81** focuses on the **rights of children**, emphasizing their protection from abuse and exploitation, including the elimination of child marriages. These constitutional provisions reflect Zimbabwe's commitment to gender equality and the protection of women's and children's rights in accordance with the Beijing Declaration.

Despite these legal provisions, there however remains a pressing need for stronger enforcement, legislation aligned with the Constitution to ensure rights are justiciable, and increased investment in programs that prevent violence and support survivors. Challenges persist, particularly in peri-urban and rural areas, with issues such as: abuse sanitised as early child marriages; under-representation of women in leadership roles; economic hardships; and increased burden arising from environmental and climate change effects, continuing to limit gender equality.

The Zimbabwe Gender Commission, as per its Constitutional mandate, is actively addressing these challenges through several initiatives:

- **Research and Programming:**, Monitoring gender equality issues, conducting research, issuing advisory notes to public institutions, and organising Gender Forums to promote policy change and address systemic barriers.
- **Complaints Handling and Investigations:** Receiving and investigating complaints of gender-related rights violations, operating a toll-free call centre for reporting violations, and providing redress through a multisectoral referral pathway which includes the Mobile One Stop Centre Initiative working with key stakeholders to provide comprehensive GBV services, including legal aid, healthcare, psycho-social support, and economic empowerment to survivors in rural and hard-to-reach areas.
- **Legal Services:** Offering legal advisory services, preparing reports, and supporting survivors of GBV through collaboration with civil society organizations.
- **Public Education:** Raising public awareness about gender equality through campaigns, training, and information dissemination to foster respect for gender equality and women's human rights.

Call to Action

The Zimbabwe Gender Commission calls on all stakeholders - government, civil society, the private sector, faith-based networks, media and citizens - to increase investment in programs that prevent violence, support survivors, and strengthen law enforcement and strengthens the legal framework. The Commission urges a greater commitment to gender equality by allocating more resources to combating violence against women and girls in response to empirical evidence that they are the majority targets.

The Commission encourages the public to actively engage in the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence from 25 November to 10 December 2024, raise their voices, and work together to end the epidemic of violence. By doing so, Zimbabwe can create a safer, more just society where women and girls live free from violence, fear, and discrimination. ZCG hopes the campaign can become reality for all 365 days.

For Gender Equality

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