

PRESS STATEMENT

Zimbabwe Gender Commission Commemorates World Day for the Prevention of and Healing from Child Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Violence

18 November 2024

On this **World Day for the Prevention of and Healing from Child Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Violence**, under the theme "**Emerging technologies: threats and opportunities for the protection of children from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.**" the **Zimbabwe Gender Commission (ZGC)** stands in solidarity with children and adolescents globally who are victims of sexual violence. Sexual abuse of children is a gross violation of their fundamental rights and a serious public health issue with far-reaching consequences on their physical, emotional, and psychological well-being.

As a nation, it is critical to recognize the profound impact that sexual abuse has on the health and future of children and adolescents. Healthcare providers play a crucial role in offering an empathetic, trauma-informed response to survivors, helping them recover from the severe effects of such abuse. The **Zimbabwe Gender Commission** calls for an increased focus on the needs of these survivors, ensuring they receive the care, support, and justice they deserve.

The Commission has made significant strides in addressing **child marriage**, another form of sexual exploitation, through the completion of the **National Inquiry on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Girls in Child Marriage including those with Disabilities**. The findings, contained in the report, reveal the alarming prevalence of child marriages in Zimbabwe, particularly among girls under 18. Some girls, as young as 15, are married off, often leading to limited access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and sexual and reproductive health rights. Child marriages also place girls at higher risk of gender-based violence. The report underscores the need to address the cultural, economic, and social factors contributing to child marriage and sexual exploitation. It further calls for the implementation of a **National Action Plan**, involving stakeholders from across society, to protect the rights and well-being of young girls.

Globally, approximately **120 million females under 20** have experienced forced sexual contact, highlighting the severity of the issue. Although comprehensive data on boys is still limited, studies suggest that between **3% and 17%** of boys under 18 are also victims of sexual violence. Additionally, **1 in 4 children under 5 years old** live with a mother who is a victim of intimate partner violence, further exacerbating the vulnerability of children to abuse.

The Zimbabwe Gender Commission commends the government for enacting **Act No. 1 of 2024 - the Criminal Law Amendment (Protection of Children and Young Persons) Act 2024**, which strengthens protections for children and young people.

The Constitution of Zimbabwe also prohibits inhumane or degrading treatment under **Section 53**, which directly addresses the grave nature of sexual abuse. The Constitution also guarantees the protection of children from all forms of abuse, including sexual exploitation, and ensures the right to health, under **Section 76** and **Section 81**. The best interests of the child are paramount, and all actions involving children must prioritize their safety, well-being, and recovery. In light of these constitutional commitments, the **Zimbabwe Gender Commission** calls for urgent and collective action to:

- Improve support systems for children and adolescents who are survivors of sexual violence.

- Strengthen the criminal justice system to ensure that perpetrators of child sexual abuse are held accountable.
- Raise awareness of the devastating impact of child sexual exploitation, abuse, and violence on the health and future of children.
- Foster a society where children are safeguarded from all forms of abuse and where their rights to live in dignity, safety, and health are fully protected.

The Commission calls on government, civil society, healthcare providers, and communities to collaborate and create a safer environment for children. Let us all play our part in ending the scourge of child sexual abuse and exploitation.

For Gender Equality

For media inquiries and further information, please contact For more information, contact ZGC Chairperson, Commissioner Margaret Mukahanana Sangarwe 0712214203/ 0772869214, or Chief Executive Officer Virginia Muwanigwa 0712899543/ 0772327955