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PRESS STATEMENT BY THE ZIMBABWE GENDER COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL CHILD 2026

11 October 2026

The Zimbabwe Gender Commission (ZGC) joins the nation and the global community in commemorating the International Day of the Girl Child under the theme, “End Child Marriage and Invest in Girls’ Rights.” This day serves as a critical reminder of our collective duty to protect the rights and future of every girl in Zimbabwe.

The Commission is using this occasion to call for renewed, urgent, and collective action to eradicate child marriage, sexual exploitation, and abuse in all its forms. The persistence of these violations is a blight on our national conscience and a direct assault on the foundational values of our Constitution.

This call to action is grounded in the findings of the ZGC’s 2022 National Inquiry on Child Marriage, Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Young Girls. The inquiry, which engaged survivors, communities, and stakeholders across all ten provinces, placed the lived experiences of survivors at the centre of the national dialogue and highlighted several critical drivers of these harmful practices:

Harmful Practices: The continued existence of child marriage, early unions, forced marriage, and kuzvarira (the pledging of girls for marriage).

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: The profound vulnerability of girls to sexual abuse, exploitation, and other forms of gender-based violence.

Poverty and School Dropout: Socio-economic challenges that expose girls to harmful situations and undermine their education and future opportunities.

Harmful Social and Cultural Norms: Community expectations and practices that normalise child marriage and undermine the rights and dignity of girls.

Barriers to Justice and Support: The significant difficulties survivors face in accessing legal assistance, psychosocial support, and effective protection.

The Need for Coordinated Interventions: The importance of a unified approach involving Government, law enforcement, schools, families, traditional and religious leaders, and civil society.

The ZGC emphasises that while Zimbabwe has a robust constitutional and legislative framework for protecting girls, laws alone are insufficient without effective enforcement and sustained community action. We remind all stakeholders of the following key legal provisions:

The Constitution of Zimbabwe provides a clear foundation for protecting the rights of girls. Section 26 requires the State to ensure that children are not pledged in marriage, while Section 78 provides that no person may be compelled to enter into marriage against their will. Section 80 guarantees women full and equal dignity, and Section 81 guarantees every child the right to be protected from economic and sexual exploitation, maltreatment, neglect, and any form of abuse.

The Marriages Act [Chapter 5:17] explicitly prohibits any person under the age of 18 from contracting a marriage, an unregistered customary-law marriage, or a civil partnership.

The Domestic Violence Act [Chapter 5:16] recognises forced marriage, child marriage, and the pledging of girls as forms of abuse.

These protections establish a clear legal obligation to safeguard girls. The continued occurrence of child marriage demonstrates that we must bridge the gap between law and practice.

The National Inquiry provided critical evidence for strengthening our collective response. The voices of girls must continue to inform the decisions that affect their lives. No single institution can end this practice alone. The Zimbabwe Gender Commission calls upon Government, Parliament, law enforcement agencies, traditional and religious leaders, parents, schools, communities, churches, civil society, development partners, the private sector, media, and young people to work together to:

- Prevent child marriage by challenging and addressing harmful norms.
- Protect survivors by ensuring access to justice, psychosocial support, and comprehensive services.
- Keep girls in school, expand opportunities for higher education and economic empowerment.

Every girl deserves a childhood, an education, safety, dignity, and the opportunity to become a productive adult. Ending child marriage is not only a legal obligation; it is a shared national responsibility and a vital investment in Zimbabwe's future.

END CHILD MARRIAGE. INVEST IN GIRLS. PROTECT THEIR RIGHTS.

For Gender Equality

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