

ZIMBABWEAN LGBTIQ+ SECTOR

PRESS STATEMENT

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

The Zimbabwean LGBTIQ+ Sector joins partners, local and international community in commemorating 2022 Human Rights Day. We adopt this year's theme "Dignity, Freedom and Justice for all" and call to action all communities to stand up for human rights. The theme speaks to the commitment made by the Government of Zimbabwe through the National Development Strategy (NDS1) 2021-25; "to adhere to the Rule of Law, Human Rights Protection and Promotion" to ensure social justice and human rights delivery. The theme is also consistent with the United Nations' 2030 Agenda, which highlights the need to find long-term solutions to deeply entrenched forms of discrimination that have ill-treated and harmed society's most vulnerable minorities.

Government, private stakeholders and the civil society have made considerable progress in promoting and pursuing human rights in Zimbabwe. Many of the international rights and conventions have been ratified by Zimbabwe for example; the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, The African Charter on Human and People's Rights and The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Historically, the new administration has also accepted two SOGIESC recommendations brought forth in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) by LGBTIQ+ serving organisations namely "To safeguard intersex minors from non-consensual surgical procedures and bodily integrity abuses" and to "strengthen efforts to address violence against women, children and all persons on the basis of their sexual orientation and gender identity". We implore the Government to implement the SOGIESC recommendations and fulfil 300 other civil, political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights obligations it agreed to implement from the UPR as also guided in the NDS1(861). We also applaud the Government for supporting vulnerable populations by opening up spaces for dialogue through the rollout of national development programmes.

Despite such efforts, the sector also continues to record cases of human rights abuses perpetrated against the LGBTIQ+ community based on their perceived sexual orientation, gender identity and expression. According to a GALZ 2021 Violations Report, a majority of LGBTIQ+ people inherently experience displacement, sexual and physical assault and blackmail. The recent Covid-19 imposed lockdowns have also exacerbated LGBTIQ+ experiences with a decline in mental health, isolation from supportive and identity-affirming spaces, arbitrary arrests and discrimination.

Moreover, because of the perceived neglect and stigma of the LGBTIQ+ community, they also encounter structural barriers including lack of access to health care, education, sustainable livelihoods and protection by law and its enforcers. This contradicts the provisions of the Zimbabwe constitution which are emphatic on equality and freedom for all citizens. The LGBTIQ+ community has managed to remain resilient to some barriers through collective support and peer-aid.

On this commemoration, the LGBTIQ+ Sector implores government and stakeholders to;

- Implement inclusive robust legal and policy frameworks to protect the LGBTIQ+ community from harmful traditions, cultural practices, exploitations and all forms of violence and abuse
- Maintain social, political, and civil rights without prejudice and discrimination on any basis including gender identity and sexual orientation
- Fulfil and enforce all human rights obligations including those espoused in the Zimbabwean Constitution on right to human dignity (Section 51), freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (Section 53) and right to equality and non-discrimination (Section 56) among others
- Promote and protect the right of all Zimbabweans to a free, fair and peaceful electoral process that upholds the human rights of all citizens and accords every citizen the opportunity to participate regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, political affiliation or any other identity.

