



ZIMBABWE PEACE
PROJECT

Independence Day Statement

Zimbabwe Peace Project adds its voice to the growing call for the full exercise and enjoyment of fundamental human rights in Zimbabwe as the country celebrates 43 years of independence. Many citizens continue to experience impediments that prevent them from enjoying the respect and fulfillment of their rights as guaranteed by the Constitution. ZPP recorded 693 human rights violations between January and March 2023 alone. 59% of these cases being acts of harassment and intimidation against general citizens, human rights defenders, activists, journalists and members of the opposition party the Citizen Coalition for Change. Zimbabwe has a history of violence, including intimidation, harassment and physical violence against opposition members, human rights activists, and others during election periods. It has become an alarming trend in which the ruling party targets opposition party supporters through state agents; like the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) and Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) who by their nature have a mandate to defend citizens regardless of political affiliation. Reports of state-sponsored violence and limits on freedoms have been recorded, raising questions about the actual independence of Zimbabwean citizens. The call is on the state to let Zimbabwean citizens freely exercise their human rights guaranteed by the Constitution.

Women, who also participated in the liberation movement alongside their male counterparts and helped bring about Zimbabwe's independence, today still face significant challenges when it comes to their political rights being upheld. Women continue to be discouraged from being engaged citizens who demand the respect of their inalienable rights due to the intimidation and harassment they experience in political spaces. Given the low participation of women in the 2018 election, the gender equity and equality that women fought for in the first and second Chimurenga has taken a step backward. Section 17 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe promotes the full participation of women in all spheres of Zimbabwean society on the basis of equality with men. Thus, there is a need for government institutions and commissions to put more effort in improving women's participation for the realization of their rights. Since independence in 1980, Zimbabwe has experienced violence both between different political parties (interparty) and within the same party (intraparty). The liberation struggle was fought so that Zimbabweans could be led by a government of the people and for the people. The use of violence to subdue, harass and intimidate people into voting for a particular political

party violates the aims and gains of the liberation struggle. The charging of exorbitant registration fees for aspiring politicians to participate in the forthcoming harmonized elections violates the core gains of the liberation struggle. Before independence, one of the reasons black people could not take leadership positions in Rhodesia was due to the lack of economic resources as the Rhodesian government's class system made sure that black people could not own or control resources. The increase in registration fees announced by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission is therefore a violation of this right to political participation by disadvantaged groups particularly women, persons with disability and the youth. During the past year ZPP recorded cases of physical harassment of journalists covering political party rallies and by-elections. Media practitioners have reported an escalation in attempts to muzzle press freedom, creating hostile conditions for election reporting. Zimbabwe's national elections have a long history of rekindling and escalating hostility towards the press corps, with journalists from privately owned media houses especially being targeted by political activists and members of the security forces. In recent months, journalists from the private media have endured physical attacks from the main political parties accused of unfavorable reporting. True independence entails promoting press freedom so that the citizenry and electorate has access to information as enshrined in the Constitution.

The country is currently going through one of the most complex socio-political and economic phase and Zimbabweans, like citizens of any other country, desire a Zimbabwe free of politically motivated abductions, torture, violence, harassment and intimidation. Abductions and torture, harassment and intimidation, arbitrary and unlawful arrests have no place in an aspiring democracy and in this modern society. As a government charged with the responsibility of governing the people of Zimbabwe, it is critical to respect the Constitution and ensure that all Zimbabweans enjoy their rights as guaranteed. In addition, it is important to understand that human rights actors and political activists are not enemies, but have an important, and justifiably constitutional role including advocating for accountability. Independence also requires economic emancipation, but this has not been realized as seen through the strikes and protests that have been staged by civil servants particularly nurses, doctors and teachers in the past year due to poor remuneration. This has negatively affected service delivery in the health and education sectors. The government should ensure that it works towards alleviating the current economic crisis and guarantee inclusive, genuine dialogue on the issues affecting Zimbabwe. On socio- economic rights, the right to water, as enshrined in Section 77 of the Constitution, has not been realized, with most urban and peri-urban settlements experiencing crippling water shortages. This has been the major cause in the resurgence of cholera cases which have now broken out in all 10 provinces of the country. Most communities rural and urban, 43 years after independence, still do not have access to clean, potable water.

On the entertainment scene, artists' freedom of expression has been stifled which violates Section 61 of the Constitution. There was chaos in Chitungwiza on 4 March when members of the ZRP stormed the stage when popular Zimdancehall musician Wallace Chirumiko popularly known as 'Winky D' attempted to sing his latest song titled 'IBotso' leading to violent skirmishes on stage. The popular song speaks out against corruption and inequality in Zimbabwe which has been further exposed by the recent 4-episode "Gold Mafia" documentary aired by the Al Jazeera Investigations Unit. The ZRP also refused to clear another popular Afro-fusion artist by the name Baba Harare, to perform at his scheduled show in Chitungwiza due to his mobilization efforts encouraging the youth to register to vote in this year's harmonized elections. True Independence guarantees freedom of expression including that of musicians and artistic creativity.

As Zimbabwe celebrates 43 years since independence the state is challenged to genuinely fulfill its mandate to respect and fulfill human rights in line with the expanded Bill of Rights.