

# UNDERSTANDING IMPUNITY

## What Is Impunity?

Impunity refers to a situation where perpetrators of human rights violations are not held accountable for their actions.

Impunity occurs when the state fails to investigate or prosecute violations due to lack of political will, fear, corruption, or weak institutions. When left unaddressed, impunity allows abuses to repeat and sends a message that some people are above the law.

## Why Impunity Is Dangerous

Impunity weakens the rule of law and erodes public trust in justice systems and it:

- Encourages repeat violations by perpetrators
- Denies victims truth, justice, and reparations
- Undermines confidence in the police, courts, and government
- Normalises violence and abuse of power
- Silences human rights defenders and critical voices



Where impunity thrives, societies become trapped in cycles of violence, fear, and injustice.

## Common Violations Where Impunity Is High

Impunity is most visible in serious human rights violations, including:

- Killings and extrajudicial executions
- Enforced disappearances
- Torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment
- Arbitrary arrests and prolonged pre-trial detention
- Abductions, intimidation, and harassment, Forced displacement
- Restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly, and association

These violations are often systematic, not isolated. Human rights defenders, journalists, activists, and political opponents are frequently targeted to silence dissent and discourage civic engagement. In many cases, abuses are committed by unknown or masked actors, while investigations are stalled, obstructed, or never initiated.

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## The Zimbabwean Constitution and the fight against Impunity

Zimbabwe's Constitution provides strong protections against impunity:

- Section 44: All state institutions and officials **must** respect, protect, promote, and fulfil fundamental rights
- Section 45: Obligations bind all branches of government
- Section 3(2)(g): Good governance principles include transparency, justice, accountability, and responsiveness
- Section 69: Right to a fair trial and access to courts
- Section 85: Any person, or someone acting on their behalf or in the public interest, may approach the courts for relief

## What the State Must Do to End Impunity

The State has a legal duty to:

- Investigate all allegations of human rights violations
- Prosecute perpetrators, regardless of status or affiliation
- Protect victims, witnesses, and human rights defenders
- Ensure independent policing and judiciary
- Provide effective remedies and reparations
- Prevent recurrence through institutional reform

Failure to meet these obligations sustains impunity and violates international and constitutional law.



## How you can fight Impunity?

If your rights have been violated or threatened, you can:

- Report to human rights organisations (e.g. Zimbabwe Peace Project, Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights, etc)
- Report to the Zimbabwe Republic Police
- Approach the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission or other independent commissions
- Seek legal action through the courts
- Support victims and speak out against abuse

**Citizen reporting is critical to breaking cycles of silence and impunity.**