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## STOP THE CONSTITUTIONAL INJUSTICE IN ZIMBABWE

*We implore the British Government as represented by the Office of the Prime Minister, the Minister for Africa, the FCDO's Southern Africa Desk and the FCDO's Zimbabwe desk, as subject to the Election on the 4<sup>th</sup> July 2024 to action this PETITION;*

*Through the representations within the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, {New} Government Ministers, UK Embassy in Zimbabwe, the SADC liaison Group and the relations with the US Embassy in Zimbabwe;*

*We submit the following evidence as to the crimes of the ruling Zanu PF regime of which this PVO Bill is just a recent example.*

We beseech the Government of the United Kingdom to entertain a more balanced representation of the interests of Zimbabwe, including opposition spokespeople both here in the UK diaspora, International diaspora and those faithful to the democratic process yet to be fully established by the Zanu PF regime – after 44 years in power.

The Zimbabwean President *must not sign* the new law proposed; which is the PVO Private Voluntary Organisation Amendment Bill. **#STOPPVOBILL**

Responding to the 'PVO hearings' which took place last week in Zimbabwe, Basil Kamombe a UK based Activist has condemned the violence which likely shows that a number of people present were bussed-in by **Zanu-PF** 'elites' and politicians. Cases of violence were recorded during the hearings.

"This bill is disastrous and especially a time where the Zimbabwean government is just passing laws that are shrinking the democratic space in Zimbabwe."

How would something that likely benefit the country, but have a group of people singing

"Asingade ngaabude muZimbabwe" **meaning if you don't, want leave Zimbabwe** or slogans like "tengesha uone mashura" (**sellout and see what happens**) it is the



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language of **Zanu-PF** and the language of violence to instil fear to those against the Bill,"

We managed to track down other Activists who have joined hands to organise a number of demonstrations in London including this petition for the international community to see the ***injustice of the constitution*** taking place in Zimbabwe.

*Greatman Makipa* shared his concern on the impact of the PVO Bill on how it will be made difficult for Human Rights Organisations to be registered in Zimbabwe, ZHRO also expressed their concern as the support coming through for development fund in Zimbabwe is close to a billion dollars and Zimbabwe will likely lose all that funding because of this absurd law if it is passed, these organisations have been helping the lives of many Zimbabweans since the government does no little help to its own citizens.

*Ronald Mutumbi* also made his comment on how about 4 members of the CCC were arrested in Masvingo for disrupting PVO Bill hearings of which the Zanu-PF youth militia, who are the real culprits, are walking scot free. It is evident that the Bill itself is a 'criminal' bill to the Citizens who are already suffering in the hands of the regime. As part of the demonstration we have Human Rights Activists who will be joining in who shared their concern over the ongoing constitution injustice in Zimbabwe.

Like Michelle Nokuthaba Mpfu, *Diana Machingauta*, *Tendai Christian Mapfumo*, *Xoliso Sithole*, *Simbarashe Jingo*, who are based in the UK who are fearlessly speaking out against the regime which is endangering their lives.

We also saw Job Sikhala was threatened last week with Zanu-PF government to charge him with the Patriotic Act after speaking at the Human Rights Summit in Geneva, Switzerland.

24<sup>th</sup> May 2024, activist & Amalgamated Rural Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe (ARTUZ) leader *Obert Masaraure* was convicted of "*defeating and obstructing the course of justice*". As campaigned for by Amnesty International Zimbabwe. 27<sup>th</sup> May 2024 - His appearance at Harare Magistrates Court for sentencing was deferred (for an unknown period) due to the Judge recusing herself – as a political action?

NOTE: "definition of a failed state" as follows:



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- "A failed state is composed of feeble and flawed institutions. Often, the executive barely functions, while the legislature, judiciary, bureaucracy, and armed forces have lost their capacity and professional independence.
- A failed state suffers from crumbling infrastructures, faltering utility supplies and educational and health facilities, and deteriorating basic human-development indicators, such as infant mortality and literacy rates.
- Failed states create an environment of flourishing corruption and negative growth rates, where honest economic activity cannot flourish."

## Evidence From other Zimbabwean Activist Groups, who are likely to be affected by this PVO Bill

The **National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations** made this statement 20th May 2024 as an image first appearing on Twitter/X:

<https://x.com/nangozimbabwe/status/1792560362526536117>

*"The Bill ENDANGERS the FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION by creating a HIGHLY RESTRICTIVE REGULATORY REGIME for Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOS) that serves to Impede Rather Than Enable freedom of association. Key provisions of the Bill restrict the INDEPENDENCE of NGOs and subject them to Excessive and Unwarranted Controls. Significantly, the Bill gives the parent ministry an overreaching mandate, which is under the firm control of the Government. In sum, the Bill will **SEVERELY LIMIT CIVIL SOCIETY SPACE AND IMPEDE THE ACTIVITIES OF NGOS**, which not only play an important role in democratic development and nation-building but also render invaluable support and services to the people of Zimbabwe."* <https://www.nangozim.org>

**Women's Academy for Leadership and Political Excellence {WALPE}** 18<sup>th</sup> May 2024 from their Press Release. {See [Appendix 3](#) for Full Statement}

<https://x.com/WalpeAcademy/status/1791753039864356939>

***WALPE** is deeply concerned about the safety and well-being of all citizens, particularly women who have been disproportionately affected by this violence considering that is it not the first time that public hearings by Parliament have degenerated into chaos.*

*Going forward, **WALPE** appeals to Parliament and the police to guarantee public safety and the protection of all citizens ensuring their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are respected.*



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**ZHRMP** – (17<sup>th</sup> May 2024 {See [Appendix 4](#) for their Full Press Statement}), the **Zimbabwe Human Rights Monitors Platform** bore witness to a distressing display of authoritarianism at the New Ambassador Hotel in Harare during the Private Voluntary Organization (PVO) Bill hearing. What should have been a democratic forum for diverse opinions to be voiced and deliberated upon was instead *hijacked* by zealous ZANU-PF supporters. These forces, aided and abetted by the very parliamentarians entrusted with upholding the democratic process, callously silenced and verbally assaulted anyone daring to challenge the provisions of the PVO bill.

Passionate Fuza, Communications Officer of **Zimbabwe Human Rights Monitors Platform** {ZHRMP} Stated on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2024 regarding the *PVO Hearings*; <https://x.com/ProtectHRDs/status/1791453672708141498> Passionate Fuza tries to reason with the Zanu PF Thugs.

*The Communications Officer, Passionate Fuza, courageously sought to express her genuine concerns regarding the PVO Bill. Yet, her noble attempt at constructive dialogue was met with a torrent of verbal violence, and repugnant hate speech. Denied the opportunity to fully articulate her views on the bill, the proceedings quickly descended into chaos, forcing an abrupt end at 2:30pm.*

*"In the face of the violent disruptions and the grave implications of the PVO Bill, we resolutely condemn the reprehensible verbal assault on Passionate Fuza. This cowardly act not only trampled upon the principles of peaceful democratic engagement but also engenders an atmosphere of toxicity and hatred within our society".*

In a statement on the 19<sup>th</sup> April 2024 the **President of ZAPU**, and son of Joshua Nkomo, **Michael Sibangilizwe Nkomo**, made the following points from his speech as recorded on the ZAPU.ORG website {<https://zapu.org/zimbabwes-broken-social-contract.html>} and as printed in full {at **Appendix 6**}

*"The flag of Zimbabwe flew on April 18, 1980, marking the end of colonialism and paving the way for black majority rule. That was the plan but as fate would have it, shadowy men harboured different blueprints for a one-party state they would wantonly step on more than 20,000 bodies to establish."*



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*""The constitution is some inconvenient document to be endured and tempered {tampered?} with, to suit the narrow interests of the ruling party. To hide its true colours, ZANU PF sails a pirate ship under the false flag of constitutional democracy, holding regular but flawed elections. In reality, ZANU PF has established a competitive totalitarian regime. Genuine opposition parties are decimated using infiltration and outright capture where possible. Truly independent media outlets are also subjected to the same strategy. In a nutshell, ZANU PF has expropriated the independence project to patent Zimbabwe into its divinely bestowed domain. In its collective warped thinking, any opposition to ZANU PF rule is blasphemous. On a good day it is considered unpatriotic.""*

*""The citizens who have stayed are robbed by the state through monetary policy inconsistency. In our 44 years of supposed independence, the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe has foisted 6 different currencies on the people, eroding savings and destroying livelihoods. The latest attempt to establish the Zimbabwe Gold (ZiG), touted as a structured currency, is yet another yawn in Zimbabwe's unending comedy of errors. Few economists in good standing are optimistic about the ability of the ZiG to become Zimbabwe's lasting panacea.""*

*""We call upon all patriotic citizens to put Zimbabwe first. Let us work in unity to extricate ourselves from the political quagmire we find ourselves stuck in. Truth be told, 44 years is as good as a lifetime, all things considered. We need national consensus to add freedom to our independence. Those who claim that the country is built by its owners do not make their mantras with the people of Zimbabwe in mind. Their mantra is premised on their belief that they are the bona fide owners of Zimbabwe.""*

Many other **International Organisations** also have expressed serious concerns regarding Zanu PF's PVO Bill, Tigere Chagutah, **Amnesty International's Director for East and Southern Africa**, in their Press Statement on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2023 said: <https://www.amnesty.org.zw/2023/02/zimbabwe-president-mnangagwa-must-reject-proposed-new-law-that-threatens-rights-and-civic-space/> {See **Appendix 1** for their full article and backgrounds since 2021 - **Appendix 2**}

*"The PVO Amendment Bill in its current form threatens civic society organizations working on human rights in Zimbabwe. The proposed bill, if it becomes law, will have dire consequences, including restricting civic space and access to humanitarian support*



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*services in Zimbabwe as it will immediately render all Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), not registered as PVOs, illegal"*

The Commonwealth Lawyers Association in their Press Statement {26th April 2023} {Full Statement [Appendix 5](#) as referenced on Twitter/X: <https://x.com/daddyhope/status/1652903920996368384>

*"CLA considers the PVO Bill to be inconsistent with the Constitution of Zimbabwe stifling Freedom of Association and Freedom of Expression. The intrusive powers contained within the PVO Bil will inhibit and curtail legitimate activities of civic society operating through private voluntary organisations, putting at risk the valuable social and economic contributions of such organisations."*

At the Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting in Mauritius in November 2022 Law Ministers of the 'Commonwealth approved the "Commonwealth Principles on Freedom of Expression and the role of the media in good governance", The CLA had assisted in the preparation of those Media Principles which state;

*"Freedom of expression is a cornerstone of democracy and underpins good governance, public accountability and respect for all human rights."*

The PVO Bill will give the government more control on CSO's and the power to arrest the CSO's employees for doing their work. The Activists in the diaspora strongly condemn this PVO Bill that it must not be signed into law. There has been threats also circulating on (X) formerly Twitter for anyone speaking against the PVO Bill. We ask the Zimbabwean Community in the UK to come and join us on the 30<sup>th</sup> of May 2024 as we raise our concern on the human rights violations used in acts of law in Zimbabwe.

*The Zimbabwean government have for years meant to suppress the citizens of its country. We have seen fear ruthlessly unleashed on the citizens of Zimbabwe. When R G Mugabe was in power, the liberties of Zimbabweans were removed, freedom of expression, freedom of movement, freedom to entrepreneurship and many other liberties were shrunk to zero. Even though sanctions were imposed against the Zanu Pf individuals, it did not actually impacted anybody within the government, but it surely put the peoples lives in total jeopardy. The injustices taking place in the country and the censorship of the Press will keep the Zanu Pf entourage to go 'unnoticed'. We in the*



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*UK and beyond, have criticised the Zanu Pf regime but I think we are not fully supported as atrocities still carry on in the country. Zanu Pf must be toppled including all its 'workers/enablers', so that a new democratic party can be endorsed as soon as is practically possible. We the diasporas have the need to come together with loud voices for the World to hear our discontentment.*

This PVO BILL is another heavy hand of the ruling Zanu Pf. We will go to London and submit our petition at number 10 Downing street, we must all meet at the Embassy before we can walk down to Downing street. The people of Zimbabwe have been choked for many years by this 'banditry government' that's always bloodthirsty and murderous. We oppose this PVO BILL and it must never pass....

For ZHRO and all Non-Zanu PF Zimbabwean Diaspora and Opposition

<i>Basil Kamombe</i>
Basil Komombe
<i>Moses Mbano</i>
Moses Mbano
<i>John C' Burke</i>
John C Burke



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## APPENDICIES

### Appendix 1

**Background:** Source **Amnesty International Zimbabwe**

<https://www.amnesty.org.zw/2023/02/zimbabwe-president-mnangagwa-must-reject-proposed-new-law-that-threatens-rights-and-civic-space/>

The Senate met on 1 February 2023 and, despite public concerns, passed the Private Voluntary Organization Amendment Bill (H.B. 10A, 2021).

On 5 November 2021, the Zimbabwe government gazetted a Private Voluntary Organization Amendment Bill ostensibly to “counter terrorism and prohibit political lobbying from, non-government organizations”.

An amended bill was then presented in June 2022 which significantly toughened the initial legislation, disregarding civil society’s concerns, and imposed stricter and more repressive clauses, and is the basis of the legislation now passed by the Senate.

The PVO Bill places all civic organizations registered under different laws under one law in an attempt to control civil society organizations perceived to be ‘anti-government.’

The PVO Amendment Bill is not the first attempt by the Zimbabwean authorities to regulate NGOs. The first one was made in 2004 through the ‘Non-Governmental Organization Bill’. It was passed by Parliament but never signed into law by then President, Robert Mugabe.

### Appendix 2

**CSO statement on the Amendments to the PVO Amendment Bill 2021**

<https://www.amnesty.org.zw/2022/08/cso-statement-on-the-amendments-to-the-pvo-amendment-bill-2021/>

“Amnesty International Zimbabwe calls for the withdrawal of the Bill and the initiation of fresh consultations to be held with the public and CSOs”.

We, the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) operating in Zimbabwe, have been closely monitoring proceedings in the Parliament of Zimbabwe on legislative reform. We have taken note of the proposed amendments to the Private Voluntary Organisations (PVO) Amendment Bill, 2021 which were presented by the Minister of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare on 26 July 2022 in the National Assembly. These amendments initially appeared in the Parliament Order Paper of 7 June 2022. Without any debate of the clauses,





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the revised Bill was adopted and has now been referred to the Parliamentary Legal Committee for scrutiny as to its compliance with the Constitution.

When the PVO Amendment Bill was gazetted on 5 November 2021, it attracted widespread national, regional and international condemnation for purporting to address the risk of money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism, albeit without adhering to the standards of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) of, among others, using a proportionate risk-based approach to identify, assess and address any money laundering and terrorist financing risks in the non-profit sector, in consultation with CSOs. There were communications to the government from four UN Special Rapporteurs on how the Bill fails to comply with international human rights standards. Since December 2021, CSOs have presented several oral and written submissions, including the CSOs' Consolidated Analysis of the PVO Bill, highlighting their concerns to Parliament and to the Parliament Portfolio Committee on Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare, and at the public hearings convened in terms of section 141 of the Constitution. In June 2022, CSOs also produced an Analysis of the Proposed Committee Stage Amendments to the PVO Amendment Bill, 2021.

### **Appendix 3**

#### **Women's Academy for Leadership and Political Excellence {WALPE}**

WALPE's statement concerning incidents of violence and intimidation at some of the Parliamentary PVO Bill Public Hearings: 18<sup>th</sup> May 2024.

The Women's Academy for Leadership and Political Excellence (WALPE) is deeply worried by the outbreak of violence and disruptions recorded during the Parliamentary public consultative hearings on the proposed amendment of the PVO bill. Incidents of violence and disruptions were recorded in Gweru, Chinhoyi, Masvingo, Marondera and Harare.

The heckling, intimidation, and physical attacks on citizens, particularly women, who attempted to participate in these hearings are unacceptable and violate their fundamental human rights. These public hearings were intended to provide a platform for Zimbabweans to engage in peaceful and constructive dialogue, sharing their views and opinions on the PVO Bill. Instead, they were marred by violence, chaos, and intimidation metered against those with dissenting voices.

WALPE is deeply concerned about the safety and well-being of all citizens, particularly women who have been disproportionately affected by this violence considering that it is not the first time that public hearings by Parliament have degenerated into chaos. Going forward, WALPE appeals to Parliament and the police to guarantee public safety and the protection of all citizens ensuring their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are respected.



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We further call upon the relevant authorities to address and ensure the following in the future:

- Choice of Venue: the selection of venues for these public hearings was inadequate, with insufficient seating, poor sanitation facilities and limited space, creating an environment conducive for chaos and disorder. In the future, the Parliament must choose venues that are accessible, safe, and conducive for citizens to participate without fear of harassment.
- Safety of Women and Children: Women were disproportionately targeted and attacked, with some even reporting physical assaults. Some women were carrying young children who were exposed to the violence. This is unacceptable and highlights the need for greater protection and safety measures to ensure their full participation.
- Respect for Views: The disruptions and heckling prevented many citizens from expressing their views and opinions. This undermines the very purpose of public hearings and perpetuates a culture of intolerance.
- The police must investigate these incidents and hold perpetrators accountable.

/IITHE END///

Twitter/X: <https://x.com/WalpeAcademy/status/1791753039864356939>

18th May 2024: WALPE is deeply worried by the outbreak of violence and disruptions recorded during the Parliamentary Public Hearings on the Private Voluntary Organizations (PVO) Bill, and appeals to Parliament and the police to guarantee public safety and the protection of all citizens.

#### **Appendix 4**

- ZIMBABWE HUMAN RIGHTS MONITORS PLATFORM
- Baines, Avenues, Harare, Zimbabwe 0263
- Tel: +263 (0) 715 763 007
- X/Twitter: Press Release Official: No. 2024/82
- <https://x.com/ProtectHRDs/status/1791530096613900647>

17th May, 2024

#### **Rejection of the PVO Bill at Harare, Zimbabwe**

**ZHRMP** - Today, the **Zimbabwe Human Rights Monitors Platform** bore witness to a distressing display of authoritarianism at the New Ambassador Hotel in Harare during the Private Voluntary Organization (PVO) Bill hearing. What should have been a democratic



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forum for diverse opinions to be voiced and deliberated upon was instead hijacked by zealous ZANU-PF supporters. These forces, aided and abetted by the very parliamentarians entrusted with upholding the democratic process, callously silenced and verbally assaulted anyone daring to challenge the provisions of the PVO bill.

The Communications Officer, Passionate Fuza, courageously sought to express her genuine concerns regarding the PVO Bill. Yet, her noble attempt at constructive dialogue was met with a torrent of verbal violence, and repugnant hate speech. Denied the opportunity to fully articulate her views on the bill, the proceedings quickly descended into chaos, forcing an abrupt end at 2:30pm.

The Zimbabwe Human Rights Monitors Platform asserts that the PVO Bill, masquerading as a measure to combat terrorism financing, represents a grave threat to democratic processes and the very foundations of the constitution. By endowing the Minister with excessive powers, this insidious legislation compromises the independence of private voluntary organizations (PVOS), effectively muzzling them and subverting their vital role in holding the government accountable.

In the face of the violent disruptions and the grave implications of the PVO Bill, we resolutely condemn the reprehensible verbal assault on Passionate Fuza. This cowardly act not only trampled upon the principles of peaceful democratic engagement but also engenders an atmosphere of toxicity and hatred within our society.

### **Recommendations:**

1. **Swift Rejection of the PVO Bill:** We call upon the government to unequivocally reject the current iteration of the proposed bill, recognizing its inherent threat to democratic principles and the inalienable rights of Zimbabwean citizens. Any endeavour to regulate PVOS must be undertaken with scrupulous care to safeguard their independence and preserve the bedrock of democracy.
2. **Assurance of Safety and Security:** We demand that the government take immediate and robust measures to ensure the safety and security of individuals exercising their right to freedom of expression. All citizens, irrespective of their affiliations or political leanings, must be safeguarded, fostering an inclusive and respectful environment conducive to open dialogue and constructive debate.
3. **Thorough Investigation of the disruptions:** We insist upon a thorough investigation into the appalling acts of verbal violence that marred the PVO Bill hearing. Perpetrators responsible for hate speech, and intimidation must face the full force of the law.



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4. Meaningful Engagement with Civil Society: The government must actively engage and collaborate with civil society organizations, to ensure that any proposed legislation pertaining to PVOS upholds the principles of good governance, transparency, and human rights standards. The voices of those working tirelessly to promote human rights and social justice must be heard and respected.

For media inquiries, contact:

- Passionate Fuza
- Communications Officer
- Zimbabwe Human Rights Monitors Platform
- Tel: +263 (0) 715 763 007

## Appendix 5

### Commonwealth Lawyers Association

*Statement regarding freedom of expression, the rule of law and support for fair and free elections in Zimbabwe*

*As published on Twitter/X by 'Daddyhope'*

<https://x.com/daddyhope/status/1652903920996368384>

The Commonwealth Lawyers Association (CLA) notes that elections are to take place in Zimbabwe later this year. In many counties elections can result in polarisation and tension, The CLA urges free 'and fair elections' in Zimbabwe and for all participants to respect the election outcome.

For democracy to flourish, Informed and tolerant debate is essential. Contrary views must be respected. Some events have occurred in Zimbabwe which cause concern to the CLA. The Private Voluntary Organisations (PVO) Bill which has passed Parliament has attracted much comment, The

CLA considers the PVO Bill to be inconsistent with the Constitution of Zimbabwe stifling Freedom of Association and Freedom of Expression. The intrusive powers contained within the PVO Bil will inhibit and curtail legitimate activities of civic society operating through private voluntary organisations, putting at risk the valuable social and economic contributions of such organisations.

At the Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting in Mauritius in November 2022 Law Ministers of the 'Commonwealth approved the "Commonwealth Principles on Freedom of Expression



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and the role of the media in good governance”, The CLA had assisted in the preparation of those Media Principles which state;

*“Freedom of expression is a cornerstone of democracy and underpins good governance, public accountability and respect for all human rights.”*

a wider international context, the CLA notes that Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states as follows:

*“Everyone has the right freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek; receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers”.*

In this context, where freedom of expression is a cornerstone of democracy, the CLA are concerned to note the conviction of a lawyer, Fadzayi Mahere, spokesperson for an opposition party in Zimbabwe. The charges were of “publishing falsehoods” and arose from a re-tweet which allegedly undermined the authority of the police and eroded public confidence in law enforcement agents. A previous decision of the Zimbabwe Constitutional Court in 2014 confirmed that there was in fact no proper legal basis for such a charge.

While the case may still be pending if an appeal is considered, the CLA are concerned that this case emblematic of an approach of the authorities in Zimbabwe to constrain comment, to intimidate people from free and public discourse and to chill debate. The CLA very much hopes this will not prove to be the case in the run up to the elections.

#### **The CLA notes Article 58 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe:**

*“Every person has the right to freedom of assembly and association, and the right not to assemble or associate with others”.*

#### **And Article 61:**

*“Every person has the right to freedom of expression, which includes-- a freedom to seek, receive and communicate ideas and other information”.*

#### **The CLA:**

- **Urges respect for the right to freedom of expression;**
- **Urges the Government in Zimbabwe to ensure that journalists, and government opposition, and representatives of civil society in Zimbabwe can exercise their rights of freedom of expression and assembly;**



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- **Encourages and supports initiatives which allow the people of Zimbabwe to work together and unite to improve their personal circumstances, healthcare, and economic advancement through organisations in civic society and urges reconsideration of the PVO legislation;**
- **Encourages a free and fair and transparent election process in which all can have confidence; and**
- **Calls upon the Government of Zimbabwe at all times to uphold the Zimbabwean Constitution and the rule of law.**

Commonwealth Lawyers Association (CLA) 26th April 2023

The Commonwealth Lawyers Association is an international non-profit organisation which exists to promote and maintain the rule of law throughout the Commonwealth by ensuring that an independent and efficient legal profession, with the highest standards of ethics and integrity, serves the people of the Commonwealth. <https://commonwealthlawyers.com>

## **Appendix 6**

<https://zapu.org/zimbabwes-broken-social-contract.html>

## **Independence 2024: Zimbabwe's broken social contract**

**By Michael Sibangilizwe Nkomo, *President of Zapu and Son of Joshua Nkomo***

“Fellow Zimbabweans, we once again commemorate the 44th anniversary of our hard-won independence. It has been 44 arduous years since the Union Jack was lowered and handed to the current King of England back in 1980, when he was a young prince.”

“The flag of Zimbabwe flew on April 18, 1980, marking the end of colonialism and paving the way for black majority rule. That was the plan but as fate would have it, shadowy men harboured different blueprints for a one-party state they would wantonly step on more than 20,000 bodies to establish.”

“The dust of our first Independence celebrations had hardly settled when the ZANU government led by Robert Gabriel Mugabe embarked on a genocidal, quasi-military operation that became known as Gukurahundi. From 1982 to 1987, hapless citizens were subjected to state sponsored violence that can only be compared to Pol Pot’s Cambodia in the 1970s. Our people suffered instead of enjoying the fruits of independence. Matabeleland and Midlands Provinces were cordoned off and turned into killing fields by the North Korean-trained 5th Brigade.”

“Gukurahundi was not a freak moment of madness as once claimed by its chief architect, the late Robert Mugabe, in a futile attempt to absolve himself of any wrongdoing. It was a well-planned and well-orchestrated system meant to subjugate and keep the people of Zimbabwe in constant and perpetual fear, bewilderment and docility. The intergenerational fear engendered by accounts of despicable atrocities that characterized Gukurahundi, has helped ZANU PF in its quest to establish a one-party state. To avoid regional and international isolation, Zimbabwe is governed through a hybrid



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system that promotes multi-party, political contestation within the confines of an uneven playing field.”

“The constitution is some inconvenient document to be endured and tempered with, to suit the narrow interests of the ruling party. To hide its true colours, ZANU PF sails a pirate ship under the false flag of constitutional democracy, holding regular but flawed elections. In reality, ZANU PF has established a competitive totalitarian regime. Genuine opposition parties are decimated using infiltration and outright capture where possible. Truly independent media outlets are also subjected to the same strategy. In a nutshell, ZANU PF has expropriated the independence project to patent Zimbabwe into its divinely bestowed domain. In its collective warped thinking, any opposition to ZANU PF rule is blasphemous. On a good day it is considered unpatriotic.”

“Many have surrendered their minds and souls to be at the full disposal of ZANU PF. State sponsored violence and enforced disappearances have been carried out by generations of men and women hired to put their fellow citizens in harm’s way. In our communities, we have state ordained murderers, rapists, ritualists and cannibals. Zimbabwe today is a far cry from the utopian society it could have easily established using its vast mineral wealth and homegrown economic strategies. Instead of prosperity, Zimbabwe is known for grinding poverty and mass exodus of its citizens. Out there, Zimbabweans are met with different fortunes. Some find sympathy and solidarity while others are subjected to hostile treatment and xenophobia.”

“The citizens who have stayed are robbed by the state through monetary policy inconsistency. In our 44 years of supposed independence, the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe has foisted 6 different currencies on the people, eroding savings and destroying livelihoods. The latest attempt to establish the Zimbabwe Gold (ZiG), touted as a structured currency, is yet another yawn in Zimbabwe’s unending comedy of errors. Few economists in good standing are optimistic about the ability of the ZiG to become Zimbabwe’s lasting panacea. A large majority of economists are pessimistic, judging from the performance of past currency experiments. At street level, ordinary citizens are not keen to embrace what could turn out to be a stillborn currency, with its coins and small notes destined for rejection not long after they enter circulation at the end of April, 2024.”

“Zimbabwe’s currency woes could not have come at a worse time. In the face of the El-Niño induced drought ravaging Zimbabwe and most parts of Southern Africa, 2024 is set to be a very difficult year for our people. Anyone who does not belong to ZANU PF is at the risk of starving as the ruling party is likely to use food aid in coercing people to support its ruinous policies. Some ZANU PF leaders are on record, publicly announcing that only ZANU PF members will be eligible for food aid. Other leaders have also stated in no uncertain terms, that only ZANU PF has the prerogative to distribute food aid to the hungry masses.”

“In spite of President Mnangagwa’s international appeal for US\$ 2 billion worth of food aid, ZANU PF continues to view Non-Governmental Organizations and aid agencies with suspicion dipped in contempt. Despite its political rhetoric and self-defeating pronouncements, the government will require a substantial amount of local and international aid to avert a humanitarian catastrophe of epic proportions. Banking on mineral resources or excessive printing of the ZiG will not cut it. Aid is what is



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critically needed. Unfortunately, aid is normally attracted to humility — a word ZANU PF leaders can hardly spell. To them, everything hinges upon their version of sovereignty, measured in centuries.”

“Looking back to the promise held by our independence 44 years ago, we are dismayed by Zimbabwe's broken social contract. The gap between the elites living in opulence and the poor existing in abject poverty has widened further than it was even during colonialism. The ultimate sacrifices of our revolutionary forebears in ZPRA and ZANLA cannot be obliterated by the passage of time. The red segment of our flag will continue to remind us of their courage and genuine patriotism. The liberation struggle, up to our independence in 1980 was not in vain. The Zimbabwean social contract was broken after 1980, by individuals who cherished a criminal and tyrannical mindset. In hindsight, they clearly harboured such inclinations long before 1980.”

“Following Zimbabwe’s sham elections in August 2023, we are witnessing the empty shell of our independence growing paler each year. It appears our people are pining for a new day they can consider as their real Independence Day. Elections are normatively supposed to offer a chance for the people to determine a government of their own choice. That is why we are opposed to any machinations about postponing elections beyond 2028. The constitution is the supreme law of the land. Anyone who attempts to shred the constitution cannot be counted among patriots. The people of Zimbabwe deserve a chance to give their mandate to genuinely elected leaders.”

“Stolen elections go against the one-man-one-vote ideal of our protracted liberation struggle. Vote rigging also deflates any hopes for economic recovery. Unemployment, drug abuse and mental health challenges have woven a web around our youths, killing their dreams and putting the future of our country at risk. We cannot expect every generation to wage a liberation struggle to change the status quo. Elections exist to effect change without the loss of blood or property. When that avenue is effectively blocked, who can stop the youth from running amok to unshackle themselves from poverty and hopelessness?”

“Let us use this Independence Day, to reflect and take stock of our cumbersome journey since 1980. For how long shall we place our hopes in a dark cloud which does not bear any rain? The status quo is no longer sustainable. We call upon all patriotic citizens to put Zimbabwe first. Let us work in unity to extricate ourselves from the political quagmire we find ourselves stuck in. Truth be told, 44 years is as good as a lifetime, all things considered. We need national consensus to add freedom to our independence. Those who claim that the country is built by its owners do not make their mantras with the people of Zimbabwe in mind. Their mantra is premised on their belief that they are the bona fide owners of Zimbabwe.”

“The gallant sons and daughters of our country who laid down their lives for our independence will only be truly honoured when we become free. Our children born after Independence will only accept to be labelled born-frees when true freedom is established in Zimbabwe. Despite the multiple challenges we face as a nation, let us not lose hope in the possibilities of change.”

“In the wise words of Mahatma Gandhi, *“Change is the only constant in the world.”*”