

## ZESN COMMEMORATES INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

**10 DECEMBER 2021** – As the World celebrates International Human Rights Day today, the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) implores all stakeholders to uphold fundamental human rights as they are integral to all human beings regardless of their nationality or gender. This is provided for in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) – **“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”**

International Day of Human Rights commemorates the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948. 'Human rights' refer to basic rights or freedoms that include people's right to live, health, and education, freedom of speech and thoughts as well as equal rights.

The day is observed to promote equality, peace, justice, freedom and the protection of human dignity.

This year's commemorations which are running under the theme **'Equality'** resonates with ZESN's values of promoting gender equality dimensions in all aspects of electoral processes and policy where everyone should be free to engage in electoral processes as polling staff, observers, voters, candidates and campaigners.

The International Human Rights Day comes at a time when ZESN is lobbying government, parliament and key electoral stakeholders to foster policies that do not create a democratic deficit or disenfranchise women and men, People with Disabilities (PWDs), youths and special groups in elections. Civil and political rights are human rights that ought to be respected as enshrined in the Constitution, regional and international treaties that Zimbabwe is signatory to such as the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance among others. The treaties or agreements seek to promote universal values and democratic principles as well as respect for human rights. When there are no principles of human rights, democracy suffers.

The Network is of the view that democracy also suffers when men and women are unable to enjoy their rights due to various reasons including gender based violence which can manifest as physical violence or other forms of aggression. It includes coercion or intimidation, harassment, cyberbullying, sexual offences and can take place in different phases of the electoral cycle and affect the credibility of an election, hence there is need to reduce inequalities and advance human rights.

ZESN implores all stakeholders to promote human rights to ensure everyone has access to the preventive benefits of human rights.

The Covid-19 pandemic is exposing and exacerbating existing human rights violations and inequalities across the globe. ZESN urges the government of Zimbabwe not to use the Covid-19 pandemic as an excuse to limit the enjoyment of human rights. This is not the time to neglect human rights but to strengthen human rights protection. As we build up to the

2023 harmonised elections, election related activities must therefore not be suspended but implemented in line with approved health protocols.

Let's all keep safe, wear masks properly, sanitize or wash hands regularly and maintain social or physical distancing. ///ENDS