

ZESN STATEMENT ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY COMMEMORATIONS

8 March 2021 - As we commemorate International Women's Day running under the theme, "*Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world.*" ZESN calls on all electoral stakeholders, the government and traditional leadership to end the exclusion and marginalization of women and girls in governance processes in Zimbabwe. International Women's Day comes at a time when the country is making strides to contain the COVID-19 pandemic and women are bearing the brunt as they are at risk of transmission from care giving with some not even being able to take care of themselves when sick leading to fatalities.

ZESN notes with concern that notwithstanding the legislative framework to ensure gender equality and equity as well as gender mainstreaming in electoral processes to enhance women's participation in democratic governance processes, Zimbabwe has not yet achieved equal representation in public office including the Presidium and other decision making positions. Political parties are also genderblind in their composition as there are no measures in place to ensure they adhere to the Constitutional dictates for their appointments and candidate selection. Furthermore, there are barriers that women face such as physical, verbal, cyber, emotional and sexual abuse which discourage participation in democratic electoral and governance processes.

The COVID-19 pandemic presents an opportunity for the government to take stock of the implementation of a plethora of domestic laws, regional and international conventions and protocols on according women equal opportunities in governance processes. Women's Day comes at a time when ZESN and other CSOs are also lobbying government and political parties to increase women's representation in the government and participation as political candidates as a way of empowering women to achieve gender parity. This is important because when women do not express their voice or participate fully, their needs will remain unattended to and society as a whole falls short of realising its full potential.

International Women's Day is celebrated annually on 8 March and offers an opportunity to reflect on progress made with regards to gender equality, to call for change and to celebrate acts of courage and determination by ordinary women who have played an extraordinary role in the history and development of their countries and communities.

The Zimbabwe Constitution under Section 17 calls on the State to promote full gender balance in Zimbabwean society, and in particular - with regard to promoting the full participation of women in all spheres of Zimbabwean society on the basis of equality with men and to take legislative and other measures to ensure that both genders are equally represented in all institutions and agencies of government at every level; and that women should constitute at least half of members of all Commissions and other elective and appointed governmental bodies established under the Constitution or any Act of Parliament.

ZESN calls upon the government to sincerely promote gender balance and to take positive measures to rectify gender discrimination and imbalances that continue to exist. The Network acknowledges and applauds the work that is being done by women organisations and other CSOs in ensuring that women remain engaged in electoral, governance and democracy issues. Happy International Women's Day to all women. // **ENDS**