



Press statement

AFRICA DAY STATEMENT: YEAR OF HUMAN RIGHTS

24 May, 2016 – The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) and the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ) join the entire continent of Africa in Commemorating Africa Day. This year's celebrations run under the theme "*African year of human rights with particular focus on the rights of women*". ZESN and WCoZ believe that this year's Africa Day theme comes at an opportune time given the numerous efforts to enforce respect for human rights and achieve equality for women in all spheres of life.

As Zimbabwe joins the rest of the continent in commemorating Africa Day, we call upon the government to fully comply with its obligations and commitments under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights to give effect to the rights and freedoms guaranteed in the Charter. In addition, Section 17(1)(a) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe which makes provision for the State to promote the full participation of women in all spheres of society on the basis of equality with men must be realised. There have been numerous reports of human rights violations in Zimbabwe illustrated by the incarceration of human rights defenders and closing of civic space. It is therefore imperative for the government to work towards the development of strong institutions that promote, and protect human rights and uphold the rule of law.

We note that for the country to realise the enjoyment of women's rights there is need for the establishment of a conducive political environment that promotes women's participation in key issues especially related to governance, elections and socio-economic activities. We call upon the government to speed up electoral reforms and ensure that the right to vote for all citizens in particular women is upheld in line with this year's theme. Furthermore, freedoms guaranteed in the Constitution such as universal suffrage, freedom of assembly and association, access to information and expression must be upheld to enable full enjoyment of human rights.

Aspiration 6 (52) of the Agenda 2063 The Africa we want states that there should be full gender parity, with women occupying at least 50% of elected public offices at all levels and half of managerial positions in the public and the private sectors. Therefore we call upon the government to make practical commitments towards the achievement of full gender participation in electoral processes as well as in the private and public sectors.

In addition, we urge the government to fully align electoral related laws with the Constitution and ensuring adherence to principles of constitutionalism, as well as put in place mechanisms and legal reforms to address issues of voter intimidation, violence, and hate speech, vote buying which have in the past inhibited women's participation in electoral processes.

The adequate provision of funds to the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission is critical for the Commission to fulfill its mandate to safeguard human rights and sanction offenders and violators of human rights especially as we move towards the 2018 harmonised elections

We call upon the government to strengthen national institutions dedicated to the promotion and consolidation of human rights and women's participation in electoral processes.

**PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE
FOR COMMENTS AND FURTHER DETAILS CONTACT**

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