



## STATEMENT ON THE OCCASION OF INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

10 DECEMBER 2012

The Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum (the Forum) and Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR) join the world in commemorating International Human Rights Day on 10 December. The day is set aside to reflect on the meaning, importance and need for human rights internationally. This year's theme ***Inclusion and the Right to Participate in Public Life*** is most relevant to Zimbabwe as the country prepares for the Constitutional referendum and elections. The freedom to vote and stand for elections as well as the freedom of association and assembly are the major political expressions of participation in public life.

The Forum and ZLHR acknowledge that the right to participate in public life is an essential component of any democratic political system. The right to participate in governance is also enshrined in the Zimbabwe Constitution and international human rights law. Article 21 of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** and article 25 of the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights** provide for the right to freedom of assembly and association, the right to freedom of expression and opinion and the right to take part in elections, in public life and decision-making. While the right to participate is fundamental to the functioning of a democracy and an effective human rights system, inclusion of all in decision-making processes prevents discrimination and is an essential precondition to the achievement of democracy.

For over a decade, the Government of Zimbabwe has limited the right to participate through intimidation; disenfranchising eligible voters, enactment of repressive legislation as well as prohibiting constructive dialogue between the government and the public. The Public Order and Security Act (2002) and the Access to information and Protection of Privacy Act (2004) have extensively been used to deprive people of their constitutionally guaranteed rights of assembly, expression and association thereby undermining participation and good governance.

As the country prepares for the Constitutional referendum and the watershed elections early next year, the Forum and the ZLHR urge the government to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms and the principle of holding periodic and genuine elections by universal suffrage - the essential elements of democracy. The Forum and ZLHR also remind the government that everyone regardless of their political party affiliation has the right to take part in the governance of the country directly as elected representatives or indirectly through freely chosen representatives.

#### **Forum members**

- Amnesty International-Zimbabwe
- Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe
- Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe
- Justice for Children Trust
- Legal Resources Foundation
- Media Institute of Southern Africa-Zimbabwe
- Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe
- Non-violent Action and Strategies for Social Change
- Research and Advocacy Unit
- Students Solidarity Trust
- Transparency International-Zimbabwe
- Women of Zimbabwe Arise
- Zimbabwe Association for Crime Prevention and Rehabilitation of the Offender
- Zimbabwe Association of Doctors for Human Rights
- Zimbabwe Civic Education Trust
- Zimbabwe Human Rights Association
- Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights
- Zimbabwe Peace Project
- Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association

Ends//

