



## **Statement On the United Nations International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances**

**30 August 2017**

The Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum (the Forum) joins the world in commemorating the UN International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances on 30 August 2017.

Enforced disappearance is used as a strategy to spread terror within society. According to Article 2 of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances, “enforced disappearances” occurs when people are arrested, detained or abducted against their will and when governments refuse to disclose the whereabouts of these people or to acknowledge the deprivation of their liberty, which places such persons outside the protection of the law. Enforced disappearance remains a global problem. This led the UN in December 2011, to officially declare that it would annually observe the International Day for the Victims of Enforced Disappearance on 30 August beginning in 2011.

To this regard, the Forum remains concerned with the growing number of reported cases on enforced disappearances in Zimbabwe following the abduction of Itai Dzamara who was a human rights activist and the Africa Unity Square movement leader on 09 March 2015. Dzamara’s whereabouts are not known to date. The Forum is also deeply concerned by the level of impunity and states passivity concerning enforced disappearances. This has had a doubly paralysing effect; on the victims (if they are still alive) who may be frequently under torture and in constant fear for their lives; and on their families, who will be ignorant of the fate of their loved ones, whom in most cases were the sole bread winners. This presents a torturous experience of emotions alternating between hope and despair, as they wonder and wait, sometimes for years, for news and information about the fate of the abductees that may never come.

The Zimbabwean Constitution protects the rights that are lost as a result of enforced disappearances, including the right to personal liberty and right to life (Section 49); the right to human dignity (Section 51); the right to personal security (section 52); the right not to be subjected to torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

The Forum calls upon all citizens and the world at large to take the pain of victims and their families to the heart. The Forum calls upon the government to show commitment to protecting all constitutionally guaranteed human rights, regardless of political affiliation, and never use the brutal force on its citizens, including enforced disappearance. The Forum urges the government to come clean in all cases of enforced disappearances and institute intense investigation on circumstances surrounding Itai Dzmarara's disappearance until the responsible persons are brought to justice. Also the Forum calls for the government to ratify and domesticate the United Nations Convention Against Torture (UNCAT) and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. Finally, the Forum demands the government to criminalise, all cases of enforced disappearances, including aligning domestic laws with the Constitution as well as with the regional and international human rights instruments.

### **Forum members**

- Amnesty International-Zimbabwe
- Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe
- CIVNET
- Counseling Services Unit
- Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe
- Justice for Children
- Legal Resources Foundation
- Media Institute of Southern Africa-Zimbabwe
- Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
- Non-violent Action and Strategies for Social Change
- Research and Advocacy Unit
- Students Solidarity Trust
- Transparency International-Zimbabwe
- Veritas 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

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