



Africa Human Rights Day

Harnessing the demographic dividend through investments in youth

21 October 2017

The Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum (the Forum) joins the rest of the continent in commemorating Africa Human Rights Day. The day is commemorated annually on 21 October and provides an opportunity for Africans to reflect and recommit on the solemn declaration undertaken by the African leaders and the African people to promote and safeguard human and peoples' rights on the continent. The day is also meant to continuously raise awareness of the African people on the value of life and humanity, and to renew Africa's collective commitment to promote, protect and uphold the fundamental human rights.

This year's commemorations are held under the theme of the African Union (AU), which is: **"Harnessing the demographic dividend through investments in youth."** Premised on the fact that over 60% of the African population are under 30 years of age and the promise of a demographic dividend it holds if adequate investments are made in their social, economic and political agency, the AU recognizes the value youths bring to Africa's development and the democratisation process as partners, leaders, and beneficiaries. This is hammering the swords into ploughshares; in Africa the youths have been used in most of the violence that occurred than in development and peace.

Further, the AU adopted a number of normative frameworks that reinforce this recognition and commits AU Member States to meaningfully engage youths in all spheres of life. These include the African Youth Charter; the African Charter on Democracy; Elections and Governance; the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights; the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child; and the Constitutive Act of the AU. These frameworks spell out rights, freedoms, and duties that accrue to young people; provide guidance on how to effectively and meaningfully

explore their potential at all levels; and collectively call for young people's participation and meaningful engagement in decision making at all levels of governance.

In the case of Zimbabwe, the underlying message of the theme is fundamental as the country prepares for the 2018 harmonised elections. Historically there is a strong link between elections and political violence in Zimbabwe, and youths have been used as instruments for propagating electoral violence, either as instigators and/or perpetrators. This regrettable legacy of violence has worked negatively for the young people and limited opportunities for their development and contributed to the perception of youth as political troublemakers. As a result Zimbabwean youth stand stigmatized for bearing the majority of the social and political sins. Political parties engage them to participate in political violence or ad hoc activities such as demonstrations or mobilisation of citizens. In the end they gain nothing and are disenfranchised from political processes.

As we commemorate Africa Human Rights Day, we invite all young people to reflect deeply on their own value and take steps to reclaim their dignity. Instead of being used as tools by political leaders, youths must become champions for the protection of human rights and work for real empowerment not political bribes that come at election times for the few, while the majority continue to languish in poverty.

In view of the 2018 elections, the Forum calls upon all political parties to treat the youth of this country with respect, value and dignity to enable them to live up to their full potential and for the nation to harvest the full demographic dividend. We further call upon the Government of Zimbabwe to put in place mechanisms to ensure the protection of the youth against any form of violence during the 2018 elections.

Youths are key stakeholders in the attainment of a country's goals, aspirations and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Forum members

- Amnesty International-Zimbabwe
- Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe
- Civic Education and Network Trust (CIVNET)
- Counselling 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
- Doctors for Human Rights
- Zimbabwe Civic Education Trust
- Zimbabwe Human Rights Association
- Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights
- Zimbabwe Peace Project
- Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association
- VERITAS
- Students Solidarity Trust
- Transparency International-Zimbabwe
- Women of Zimbabwe Arise
- Zimbabwe Association for Crime Prevention and Rehabilitation of the Offender
- Zimbabwe Association of

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