

Press Statement for Immediate Release

24 January 2019

Introduction

We as Matabeleland Collective, a network of Civil Society Organisations and Churches based in Bulawayo register our collective concerns arising from the 14 to 23 January 2019 social unrest stemming from the raising of fuel prices without wide consultations. This social unrest was characterised by indiscriminate action on the part of police including reckless use of tear gas and arbitrary arrests of over 500 people, beatings, abductions and inaction as looting began in most suburbs of the city. The Collective is concerned that Police Officers became preoccupied with stopping possible protest action and failed to play their peacekeeping role, failing to protect citizens and businesses when looting began in most suburbs of the City.

The Collective note that residents then participated in destruction of property, looting of goods and hooligans took the opportunity to terrorise citizens attempting to get to the safety of their homes. Events at the beginning of that fateful week led to the unfortunate death of more than six residents including one Police Officer. It is sad to note that the death of the police officer, hooliganism, rape, theft and mayhem led in part to deployment of the military armed with live ammunition within our City ready to shoot or beat first and never ask questions or investigate for true criminal behaviour.

The Matabeleland Collective take full cognisance that the level of social unrest was only surpassed by the Gukurahundi Campaign of early 1980s where high density suburbs were cordoned off and police and soldiers went door to door beating and arresting people. However, in this day and age the collective expected principles of peace and democracy to prevail and that Police would respect their Constitutional mandate to stand for the protection of every citizen rights to move freely and in peace in their homes. Therefore, it was worrying to hear and verify reports that heavily armed Police and Soldiers went door to door indiscriminately assaulting citizens at the dead of night trying to peacefully sleep in their homes. The Collective note such violations in Mabuthweni, Iminyela, Emganwini and Entumbane townships in Bulawayo and more Suburbs are still being visited. After kicking the doors open, groups of Soldiers and Police demanded all male children and adult to come out of their homes and lay down on their stomachs and get thoroughly beaten and threatened for 'allegedly killing a police officer or sending their children to loot'. We estimate that more than 1000 residents were subjected to this treatment despite there being 2 people in remand prison charged with the death of the police officer. Toddlers, sisters and mother watched their male relative beaten in horror.

Whilst they went door to door in these suburbs they also targeted anyone along the way found outdoors after 7pm as if there was an official curfew.

Concerns

We are concerned that the state especially the army and the police have violated the fundamental rights embedded in the Constitution especially 'freedoms from torture,

cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. Furthermore, there are violation of rights to free movement, expression and association with the freedom of movement severely compromised in most high density suburbs.

We as a Collective are concerned that the night-time indiscriminate mass beatings in high density areas, reinforces the trauma of the Gukurahundi especially the pattern for mass arrests and random beatings and assault of citizens.

Recommendations

We as Matabeleland Collective call upon the Security Forces to adhere to their constitutional mandate and duty of protecting citizens including business people trading formally and informally. We also call upon the Police to cease and desist from their 'arrested to investigate' approach towards a legal investigate before arrest protocol. We call on the police to accept all reports of criminal conduct be it civilian or uniformed forces and to bring all alleged perpetrators to justice in line with the provisions of the Constitution of Zimbabwe.

We further wish to remind the Security Forces that the Constitution and the laws of Zimbabwe have clear mechanisms of dealing with crime through the criminal justice system which must allow due process and not "politically partisan orders."

We as Matabeleland Collective call for the government to:

1. Allow the Police to carry out their duties in accordance with the constitution of Zimbabwe and to send the Soldiers back to their barracks.
2. Immediately stop the night-time and other unlawful raids on people's homes and indiscriminate beating of citizens.
3. The State should immediately send genuine messages of condolences to all those who have lost loved ones and ensure support is given for burials and families just as is done for road accidents.
4. The state must immediately cease all unlawful detentions of minors and citizens and respect the 'innocent until proven guilty' mantra. This means all those in remand must be accorded any and all support from their lawyers and family members.
5. We call on the President of Zimbabwe E.D. Mnangagwa to realise that citizens of Zimbabwe have had enough – all economic reforms result in more burdens minute by minute including the 2% Tax and fuel hike. Citizens need platforms to engage their Government if there is to be a unity of purpose to deal with economic recovery. Give Citizens a platform so they don't have to resort to criminal behaviour to bring relief to their poverty.

Ends

25 January 2019

Editors Note

Context of the Stayaway

The residents of Bulawayo awoke to a Stayaway dubbed as #Shutdown on 14 January 2019 triggered by the announcement of fuel price adjustment announced by the Government of Zimbabwe on 12 January 2019. The shutdown was characterised by protests in the City Centre which resulted into the Zimbabwe republic police firing teargas to disperse the protestors as well as indiscriminately in people's residences and places of work. The Shutdown was further characterised by blockages of roads leading to the city centre and people residences. On the first day of the Stayaway the Commuter Taxis Services were suspended and this left citizens who were in the city centre stranded with no means of travelling. On 15 January 2019, the western townships of bulawayo were 'invaded' by unknown persons some of whom were in mask and went on sporadic spree of breaking locks of retail shops and businesses. It is alleged that these invaders were moving in groups of at least 20 persons armed with hammers and bolt openers among other weapons. It is further alleged that the invaders enticed residents to enter the business premises and this led to a frenzy looting of retail shops and destruction of property. Following the looting frenzy and public violence the Police in the company of the Zimbabwe National Army conducted a dragnet search in the residential areas during the night raids from 15 January 2019 which have continued to date. The contingency of the Security forces would move from house to house illegal breaking doors, windows and forced all male persons out. Most males were force to lie on the ground and beaten with sticks, shambok, booted feet, fists and some prodded with the back of AK 47 weapons. Some males were beaten and detained in Police Cells and to unknown destinations. In addition to indiscriminate assault of residents and citizens the Security Forces conducted a dragnet arrests of alleged looters of goods from the shops. The Human Rights Monitors from the Civic Society Groups noted that there was no due process followed in investigating cases of looting and public violence. The Collective received reports that over 500 people were arrested and scores are receiving treatment from local hospitals as a result of beatings and assaults by the Security Forces.

Residents who were interviewed are leaving in fear of continued harassment by the Security Forces. A number of residents report that part of the Police and the Army also participated in looting of goods from retail shops. In addition the residents state they are living in fear and have no where to seek protection and are wary of even attempting to make reports at the nearest Police Stations.

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Background

Matabeleland is home to a number of Civic Society Organisation and Church leaders and Organisations who decided to form a Collective with the objective of building consensus and an effective social movement within Bulawayo, Matabeleland South and North to influence national and regional policy in support of: participative democracy; healing, peace and reconciliation; economic renewal; social inclusion and equality; and devolution.

The Collective has convened a 2 December 2017 Peoples Convention and a Strategic retreat in February 2018 resulting in the publishing of a consensus compendium containing the collective plan – **Devolved Governance Plan for Inclusivity for Equalisation for Matabeleland (DGPIEM).**

Endorsing Organisations

1. Abammeli Human Rights Lawyers
2. Bambatha Creative Trust
3. Basilizwi Trust
4. Beitbridge Community Development Trust
5. Beitbridge Residents Trust
6. BPRA - Bulawayo Progressive Residents Association
7. Brethren In Christ Compassionate and Development services
8. Bulawayo United Residents Trust (BURA)
9. Bulawayo Vendors and Traders Association (BVTA) Bulawayo Youth Arise
10. Centre Innovation and Technology
11. Christian Legal Society
12. Center for Innovation and Technology (CITE)
13. Community Youth Development Trust (CYDT)
14. Contact Family Counselling Centre
15. Dumiso Dabengwa Foundation
16. DP Foundation
17. Ecumenical Church Leaders Forum
18. Emthonjeni Women's Forum
19. Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe
20. Godwayo Community Development Trust
21. Grace to Heal
22. Gwanda Community Development Trust
23. Gwanda Residents Association
24. Habakkuk Trust
25. Hope in Destiny
26. Ibhethu Likazulu
27. Inkanyezi Development Trust
28. Kulani Trust
29. LIBADE
30. Lupane Women's Centre
31. Masakhaneni Projects Trust
32. Matabeleland Widows Development Trust
33. Matabeleland Zambezi Water Trust
34. Matobo Community Development Trust
35. Mpopoma Residents Trust

36. NANGO Western Region
37. National Youth Development Trust (NYDT)
38. Public Policy Research Institute of Zimbabwe
39. Plumtree Development Trust
40. Public Policy Research Institute Zimbabwe (PPRIZ)
41. Rural Communities Empowerment Trust (RUCET)
42. Save Matabeleland Coalition
43. Savuka Arts Association
44. South Western Region Gender Network (SWRGN)
45. Streetwise Informal Workers Association
46. Tsororo-San Development Trust
47. UDASIZA
48. Ukuthula Trust
49. ULUNTU-CIISE TRUST
50. Umhlahlo Wesizwe
51. Victory Siyanqoba Trust
52. Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe
53. Women's Institute for Leadership Development (WILD)
54. Women's Media Development Trust
55. Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA)
56. Young Women's Alliance
57. Youth Economic Forum
58. Youth for Innovation Trust
59. Youths for Today and Tomorrow
60. ZIDIFO
61. Zimbabwe Christian Alliance (ZCA)
62. Zimbabwe Council of Churches and Greater Bulawayo Women's Fellowship
63. Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association
64. Zimbabwe Human Rights Association
65. ZIPRA Veterans Association