

## **CSO's JOINT STATEMENT ON THE CRIMINALISATION OF CSO'S AND THEIR WORK IN ZIMBABWE.**

18 JANUARY 2013-We, the Zimbabwean Civil Society Organizations, listed below, (CSOs) condemn the unashamed intimidatory and repressive tactics being employed by the state against civil society organizations and leaders in Zimbabwe, which we have taken note of over a lengthy period.

We contend that the unashamed attacks by the state on Civil Society are indicative of a closing of democratic and electoral space, and based on current form, all and any organization involved in election related issues would be criminalized and attacked.

As CSO, we have documented a well-calculated and intensified long running assault on our freedoms and activities including those of human rights defenders (HRD's), Human Rights Lawyers and Arts and Media practitioners, by both State and other non state actors through slandering, intimidations, raids, arrests, prosecutions and persecution.

We take such harassment, which recently culminated in the arrest, prosecution and detention of Zimbabwe Human Rights Association (ZimRights) Director Okay Machisa, who is also the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition Chairperson, as meant to scare and silence organisations that have been advancing genuine people's development. This development follows the earlier incarceration of another ZimRights employee, Leo Chamahwinya, on trumped up charges of forgery, fraud and spreading falsehoods. Similar charges and actions have been taken against other organizations like the YIDEZ, and the Elections Resource Centre (ERC).

The primary goal of launching this onslaught is simply meant to criminalize the work of civil society, discredit it and showcase civil society as unpatriotic and devoid of national interest. This discourse, which has been peddled by some elements in the state and other political parties seems to have gathered momentum and has now been turned into action by deliberately and subtly intimidating and harassing CSO activists and the Human Rights Lawyers who defend them, based on trumped up charges or for simply doing their job. This relentless assault on CSO's and accusing them of several misdemeanors is to suggest to the public the existence of a wide-ranging conspiracy targeting the stability of the country and to paint civil society organisations as a danger to State security.

As Civil Society we unequivocally reject all the insinuations and willful

misrepresentations of our legitimate work.

The orchestration of serious allegations against CSO's is meant to distract the attention of the public and international community from the important issues which the country is faced with which hinge on the full implementation of the Global Political Agreement, and the holding of free and fair elections through facilitating critical reforms meant to incubate the respect of the will of the people.

We are certain that the Zimbabwean authorities particularly, the police and Prosecuting authorities, are well aware of the role of civil society, but often times willfully mislead public opinion about our legitimate activities, as they do the bidding of political masters. In this respect, we note with regret and consternation, the resolution from the ZANU PF December 2012 Conference, where the party resolved to deregister so called "errant NGO's operating outside their mandate". We are well aware that this was double speak and a euphemism for organisations like ZimRights and others of its ilk working on Human Rights, Governance and Election issues.

The vaunted targeting of NGO's and their officials go wholly against the spirit expected of a Government of National Unity that should be making moves towards reform after years of being an island of repression in a sea of democracy in the SADC region.

Over the years, we have noted that CSO's suddenly become endangered species once there is an indication of a political contest particularly an election. While we will not be surprised if they succumb to the temptation, we urge the Government of Zimbabwe to desist from this disastrous and unwarranted trend, and recant violence and intimidation as tools for engagement in national affairs, especially as the country moves toward a constitutional referendum and a general election in 2013.

We therefore declare the following:

1. That political leaders in the inclusive government act immediately to cease the undue harassment of CSO's throughout the country.
2. That the Government of Zimbabwe must urgently take measures to ensure the protection of CSO's and HRDs and not impede their legitimate activities which promote and advance implementation and fulfillment of human rights obligations by the state and non-state actors.
3. That the police and prosecuting authorities should exercise professionalism

and carry out their duties in a non-partisan manner and desist from the intimidation of NGO workers through unnecessary and unwarranted visits and searches.

We contend that these attempts to criminalise NGOs, and discredit their work are wholly associated with impending elections and thus call upon SADC, in line with their earlier summit resolutions (if any inclined to this subject broadly) and the AU to

1. Urge the Government of Zimbabwe to allow CSO's in Zimbabwe to operate without being criminalised, intimidated and harassed, as key prerequisites to the holding of elections, which can pass the credibility test.
2. Implore the Government of Zimbabwe to respect the notion of separation of power between the executive and the judiciary by allowing courts to do their work without any undue influence.

We will from now on;

1. Call upon our brothers and sisters in the region and the international community to continue supporting the people of Zimbabwe in our quest for justice, freedom and democratisation.
2. Urge our solidarity partners to picket at the Zimbabwean Embassies and their local Foreign Affairs Ministries on the issues raised above.
3. Demand a meeting with the Leaders of Political parties (Principals) in government to raise our issues.
4. Present our issues to SADC and the AU as well as the facilitation team on the attacks on CSOs because this is related to Elections.

Ends//

**ORGANISATIONS WHO HAVE AGREED  
TO BE ENDORSED**

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| 1) Achieve Your Goal Trust (AYGT)                      | 7) Centre for Natural Resources Governance (CNRG)    |
| 2) Artists for Democracy in Zimbabwe Trust (ADZT)      | 8) Christian Alliance                                |
| 3) Build a Better Youth Zimbabwe                       | 9) Christian Action Trust                            |
| 4) Bulawayo Agenda                                     | 10) Combined Harare Residents Association (CHRA)     |
| 5) Bulawayo Progressive Residents Association (BUPRA)  | 11) Counselling Services Unit                        |
| 6) Centre for Community Development in Zimbabwe (CCDZ) | 12) Ecumenical Support Services (ESS)                |
|  | 13) Election Resource Centre (ERC)                   |
|  | 14) Gays and Lesbians Association in Zimbabwe (GALZ) |
|  | 15) Heal Zimbabwe                                    |

- 16) Institute for Democratic Alternatives in Zimbabwe (IDAZIM)
- 17) Institute for Young Women's Development (IYWD)
- 18) International Revolutionary League (IRL)
- 19) Media Institute in Southern Africa (MISA)
- 20) Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe
- 21) National Association of Non-governmental Organisations
- 22) National Constitutional Assembly
- 23) National Association for the Care of the Handicapped
- 24) National Youth Development Trust (NYDT)
- 25) Nhimbe Trust
- 26) Platform for Youth Development (PYD)
- 27) Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ)
- 28) Radio Dialogue
- 29) Restoration of Human Rights (ROHR)
- 30) Savannah Trust
- 31) Solidarity Peace Trust
- 32) Students Christian Movement of Zimbabwe
- 33) Transparency International Zimbabwe (TIZ)
- 34) Uhuru Network
- 35) Veritas
- 36) Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ)
- 37) Women's Institute for Leadership Development (WILD)
- 38) Youth Agenda Trust (YAT)
- 39) Youth Agrarian Society
- 40) Youth Initiative for Democracy in Zimbabwe
- 41) Zimbabwe Civic Education Trust
- 42) Zimbabwe Doctors for Human Rights Association
- 43) Zimbabwe Coalition of Debt Development (ZIMCODD)
- 44) Zimbabwe Election Support Network
- 45) Zimbabwe Farmers Union Development Trust (ZFUDDT)
- 46) Zimbabwe Human Rights Association
- 47) Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum
- 48) Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU)
- 49) Zimbabwe Organization for the Youth in Politics (ZOYP)
- 50) Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP)
- 51) Zimbabwe Poets for Human Rights (ZIMPHR)
- 52) Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum (ZSF)
- 53) Zimbabwe United Residents Association (ZURA)
- 54) Zimbabwe Youth Movement (ZYM)
- 55) Zimbabwe Young Women for Peace Building
- 56) Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum