

CSOs Regional Civil Society Conference

Communique

15 August 2014, Bulawayo-We the SADC civic society organisations (CSOs) having met during the Regional Civil Society conference held today in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, are deeply concerned that key issues relating to the state of human rights and democracy in particular elections, rule of law, peace and security are likely to be side-lined at the Summit of SADC Heads of State and Government scheduled for 17 and 18 August 2014 in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe although they remain important issues in the region.

We are, therefore, concerned that:

- **SADC has remained an elitist club pre-occupied with maintaining power at the expense of addressing poverty, unemployment and deep inequalities in the region.**
- **The human rights situation in Swaziland continues to deteriorate with the judicial persecution of human rights defenders particularly the imprisonment of Human Rights defenders Thulani Maseko and Bheki Makhubu.**
- **Weak natural resource governance, aided and abetted by corporate excesses is impacting negatively on the promotion and protection of human rights without benefitting famished communities.**
- **The SADC Tribunal remains suspended and depriving SADC citizens of an avenue for redress outside country jurisdictions.**
- **Legitimate NGO activities are being hampered and stifled and therefore disenfranchising citizens especially through calculated introduction of repressive laws targeting NGOs.**

Faced with all these challenges, the CSOs identified some specific recommendations addressed to the summit including:

- **The immediate repeal of the Zambia NGO Act**
- **The immediate and unconditional release of Swazi human rights defenders Thulani Maseko and Bheki Makhubu and end persecution of other HRDs within the region.**
- **SADC should press for human rights improvement across the sub-region, particularly in Swaziland, Angola, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Zambia since human rights are central in achieving sustainable economic development and regional integration.**
- **An immediate robust, active and non-selective approach towards resolving member states disputes based on principles and well laid out SADC protocols**
- **While we acknowledge the assumption of Zimbabwe for the SADC chairmanship, we remain deeply concerned with continued land invasions and internal displacements of Zimbabwe by the elites for self-aggrandisement and resource plundering**
- **Immediate suspension of Swaziland from SADC until there is restoration of democracy , respect for human rights and rule of law**
- **The resuscitation of the SADC Tribunal with a clear legal framework that will ensure individual access for all SADC citizens and compliance from all member states.**
- **Enabling citizens' "participation in promoting peace and security in the region**

- **Establishing Open Government Partnership (OGP) as a way of improving accountability and good governance –**
- **Review of SADC Principles and Guidelines on the Conduct of Democratic Elections to enhance democracy and compliance by member states**
- **A creation of a people centred approach towards development based on social and economic rights.**