



Statement on Police use of Brutal Force on Protesters

5 July 2016

The Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum (the Forum) unreservedly condemns in the strongest terms the appalling use of excessive force by the police against protesters in Epworth, Mabvuku, Tafara, Ruwa and other areas in Harare. While the Forum does not condone violent protests, the Forum is disturbed by the heavy-handedness of the police in quelling the protests which almost degenerated into a state of civil anarchy in Epworth.

Since the beginning of the year, citizens have been holding protests over the never ending economic crisis exacerbated by corruption; the disregard of the rule of law; failure by the government to account for the missing \$15 billion in diamond revenue; the promulgation of the Statutory Instrument 64 of 2016 which bans the importation of certain good and basic products; the alarming number of police roadblocks in all roads in Zimbabwe; lack of public confidence in the consultative structures designed to resolve citizens grievances and concerns; and the failure by the government to pay civil servants and pensioners on time among other issues.

The protests reached their peak on Monday 4 July 2016, when public transport operators in Ruwa, Mabvuku, Tafara, and Epworth protested in and around Harare against increased police roadblocks. The police responded by use of teargas and water cannons on the protesters and innocent civilians. In Epworth for example, police moved door to door indiscriminately assaulting citizens. School children were also caught up in the crossfire.

The Forum wishes to remind the government that the freedom to demonstrate and petition is a constitutional right guaranteed in Section 59 which states: *“Every person has the right to demonstrate and to present petitions, but these rights must be exercised peacefully.”* The duty of the police is thus to ensure that Zimbabweans enjoy this and other rights peacefully and not to impede the enjoyment of this right. Moreover, the government has an obligation under domestic, regional and international law to take reasonable steps to facilitate the enjoyment of the right to peaceful assemble, demonstrate and petition.

In light of the growing dissent over the failing economy and the demaging effects of corruption, the Forum urges the Government of Zimbabwe to urgently address the socio – economic crisis lest Zimbabwe risks degenerating into a failed state. The government should also allow citizens to participate in governance issues through consultations before implementation of policies such as the SI 64 of 2016 that has also resulted in protests.

The Forum also urges Zimbabweans to exercise their right to protest peacefully and in a non-violent manner, and without disregarding other people’s rights or jeopardising national security. Chapter 2: 10 of the Constitution states, "*The State and every person, including juristic persons, and every institution and agency of government at every level must promote national unity , peace and stability.*" We therefore urge all citizens, including the police and political leadership, to fulfil these constitutional obligations for a peaceful Zimbabwe.

Forum members

- Amnesty International-Zimbabwe
- Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe
- Civic Education Network Trust
- 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
- 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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