



12 September 2016

**Statement in Support of the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission Remarks on
Partisan Food Distribution**

The Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum (the Forum) proudly associates itself with the work of the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission, in particular and its stand on discriminatory and partisan food distribution. The Forum notes that the Commission is working against the tides in fulfilling its constitutional mandate. Zimbabwean citizens and human rights defenders have time and again complained about discrimination and politicisation of food aid and other social benefits. The President himself spoke against partisan food aid distribution. This is because hunger knows no party line or card. Regardless of this, his party supporters are in contempt of his position. The Forum, therefore, welcomes this bold and timely intervention by the ZHRC on partisan food aid distribution. This is in line with its mission and is a testimony of its independence and non-partisanship.

The Constitution generally arrogates the responsibility to protect to government. This is a non-partisan responsibility. Section 58 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe bestows upon every person the freedom of assembly and association. Association can be of a political nature as protected under section 67 of the Constitution. Enjoyment of such rights should not result in discrimination on any basis. Section 56 unequivocally states that *“Every person has the right not to be treated in an unfairly discriminatory manner on such grounds as their nationality, race, colour, tribe, place of birth, ethnic or social origin, language, class, religious belief, **political affiliation, opinion, custom, culture, sex, gender, marital status, age, pregnancy, disability or economic or social status, or whether they were born in or out of wedlock.**”* Notwithstanding divergence in political views and affiliations, when it comes to food distribution and other social amenities, people should be treated equally and in a non-discriminatory manner. This is because food is a basic need. Partisan politics is a choice.

The Forum applauds the fact that ZHRC came strongly on these issues at the right time. Many people have been affected by drought; as such food aid must not be used as a political bait to lure people to support some political parties. The Forum is concerned that such behaviour exhibited by some overzealous ZANU PF party members and other civil servants may escalate as Zimbabwe drifts towards 2018 elections.

As the Forum stands by the Commission on this issue, we call upon all the relevant authorities to be restrained from manipulating food aid as a way of gaining political support. We also implore both the Public Service Commission and the Zimbabwe Republic Police to take necessary steps towards those partisan officials found wanting in executing their duties. Every person who is in need of food should be fed by the state since the Constitution places a

duty on the same under section 77 of the Constitution to make sure that every person has access to sufficient food.

Forum members

- Amnesty International-Zimbabwe
- Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe
- 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
- 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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