

ZIMBABWE HEADS OF CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS

PASTORAL STATEMENT ON ESCALATING VIOLENCE, ABDUCTIONS, MURDER, TORTURE AND INTIMIDATION IN ZIMBABWE

Exodus 20 vs 13: Thou Shalt Not Murder *16 November 2023*

The Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD) is a grouping of four apex organizations that represent 77.2% of the Zimbabwean population. It comprises of Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference (ZCBC), Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) and Union for Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe (UDACIZA). The ZHOCD acts as a central unifying structure bringing together the Christian church around common themes and objectives.

The ZHOCD is deeply concerned with the escalation of violence in the post August 2023 elections period and the run-up to the by-elections scheduled for the 9th of December 2023. The bible emphasizes the sanctity of life and the importance of protecting it. All human beings were created in the image of God, making human life and dignity sacrosanct. God will not leave unpunished those who torture and kill fellow human beings.

1 Peter 3:12: For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. Matthew 5:21-22: "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell."

The scripture above is a clear illustration of God's abhorrence to the infliction of harm on and causing of death to another brother or sister and he pronounces judgement on such acts. Further, the Constitution of Zimbabwe, in its elaborate bill of rights guarantees the right to life for all citizens (S.48). The bible warns that violence begets violence (Mathew 25:52). This current trend of violence therefore has a risk of bringing the nation into a state of anarchy and widespread violence.

Electoral processes should not take away this fundamental right from anyone in the country. Citizen agency in any democracy should be characterised by freewill that is guaranteed by the fundamental right to choose. Therefore, even in our democracy, citizens must exercise their right to select and associate with any political party of choice as enshrined in the country's Constitution. Therefore, any act that contradicts it is a challenge to the principles of the democracy and a blatant disrespect and disregard to the Constitution.

The growing wedge between political actors is shredding the fabric of humanity that once united every Zimbabwean and this is resulting in growing fragmentation and instability in local communities. Neighbours and families are turning on each other due to differences in political ideology yet the Scriptures challenge us to be our brother's keeper and love one another (Mathew 22:39).

The recent abductions of Tapfumaneyi Masaya, Takudzwa Ngadziore, James Chidhakwa and Womberaishe Nhende among other unreported cases of displacement, torture and kidnapping have a negative effect on the state of human security in the country. The death of Tapfumaneyi Masaya following his abduction is regrettable and undermines the sanctity of life that is upheld by the bible and the Constitution of Zimbabwe. True democracy is not built on threatening and criticising those that speak and speak out. True democracy is built on the search for truth and the pursuit of justice.

Our concerns:

The continued occurrence of violence seemingly unabated will inevitably deepen polarisation and promote intolerance in our communities. The escalation of politically motivated violence is contrary to the peace pledges and commitment to peace that all political parties signed. Resultantly, we will not be able to move forward and effectively realise our collective developmental goals as a nation if violence remains a common thread in society.

The threat to human security that is caused by violence is worrisome. The risk presented with this is that aspersions are cast on our ability as a nation to guarantee the safety of people and property in our country. Invariably, this has an effect on the country's ability to attract meaningful foreign direct investment and will be marked as an unsafe nation.

The continued recalls in the house of assembly imply that the country will continue to be gripped and fixated in election mode. Instead of focusing on nation building and economic development in the post 2023 elections, Zimbabwe's development will remain stunted affecting the welfare capacity to support the poor and vulnerable.

Elections have a heavy fiscal strain and lessons from the 2023 elections, the limited fiscal resources have a bearing on the capacity of the Election Monitoring Board, ZEC to conduct elections. The possibility of by-elections against this background not only raises questions on the much constrained financial resources but will be a huge test for conducting credible, free and fair elections barely a year of the heavily contested elections.

In view of the above:

- i. The church continues to call for peace, love and unity and utterly condemns all forms of violence. Strong nations are built on seeking God's love, respecting all human rights, and demonstration of compassion for one another,
- ii. ZHOCD member churches at community level should be alert and respond quickly to early warning signs of violence. Cases of violence should be reported to police and efforts should be made to ensure that survivors get all the needed assistance on time,
- iii. The security sector is called upon to investigate and bring to finality all the cases of abductions and murder that have been reported to them. Offenders must be given deterrent sentences and should be held accountable for their actions,
- iv. The Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) should fully investigate and identify perpetrators of violence and book them with respect to the rule of law. This contributes to the restoration of confidence of the institution as the protector of human security,
- v. Political leaders are challenged to continue with the call for peace, from national level and cascading to communities through their respective structures. Electoral processes should not always be associated with violence as this undermines the credibility of electoral process and perpetuates marginalization of the country by other states,

vi. The church implores security institutions to be non-partisan and to also prioritise human security of every Zimbabwean regardless of political affiliation. In line with SDG16, the country needs to strengthen institutions for justice and peace,

vii. The church will amplify local peace building efforts, leveraging our Christian values and ethos towards building a cohesive society,

viii. The church calls upon the Civil society and other non-state actors to collectively work towards peacebuilding and building of a better Zimbabwe.

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