

STATEMENT ON THE ROBERT MUGABE NATIONAL YOUTH DAY

“Empower Youth, Secure the Future,”

1 Timothy 4:12

The Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) joins the rest of the country in commemorating the Robert Mugabe National Youth Day, affirming its unwavering commitment to the rights, dignity, and well-being of young people in Zimbabwe. This year’s commemorations are running under the theme, “Empower Youth, Secure the Future,” and come at a time when young people face momentous challenges. However, this day also serves as a reminder of the resilience, strength, and potential of our youth in shaping a brighter future for Zimbabwe.

Despite the challenges, young people in Zimbabwe continue to demonstrate remarkable perseverance, resilience, and innovation. Many have ventured into the informal economy, entrepreneurship, creating jobs and economic opportunities despite a difficult environment. Others have excelled in arts, sports, technology, and civic advocacy, showcasing Zimbabwe on the global stage. Their creativity and determination under the difficult socio-economic and political challenges in Zimbabwe serve as a beacon of hope for the nation.

Government programs, such as vocational training and the youth quota in Parliament, represent critical steps toward youth empowerment and transformation. Civil society organizations and faith-based groups have also played a crucial role in fostering mentorship programs, equipping young people with skills, and promoting moral and ethical leadership. These efforts should be strengthened and supported to ensure the holistic development of Zimbabwean youth.

As we celebrate this day, we must acknowledge that today's youth face a concerning level of disengagement from critical issues that directly affect their lives and their future. Many young people have shown a general apathy to engage in civic matters, such as holding leaders accountable, fighting corruption, challenging unjust tax systems, being environmentally conscious, and demonstrating empathy and love for neighbors. This apathy poses a threat to the progress of our society, and it is our responsibility to reignite a sense of purpose and action among the youth.

This is a time when many young people have lost hope and are increasingly turning to drug and substance abuse, as well as engaging in immoral behavior. The rise of digitalization and social media platforms, while offering great potential for education and connection, has also contributed to unproductive behavior. Young people often spend excessive amounts of time on social media, where they are exposed to disinformation and unrealistic portrayals of life, which can deepen their feelings of inadequacy, isolation, and hopelessness. The pressure to conform to digital trends, coupled with the overwhelming amount of false information, has created an environment where many young individuals struggle to find direction and purpose.

As a church, we believe in God's plan for the youth of Zimbabwe. The Bible assures us in Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." This scripture reminds us that, despite present struggles, God has a purpose for every young person, and through faith, resilience, discernment and collective effort, a prosperous future is possible.

In a time when youth disengagement is on the rise, we must also remind them of the transformative mission of Jesus Christ as outlined in Luke 4:18-19, who empowered the vulnerable, educated people, and encouraged leaders to be accountable. Jesus' mission brought complete change to the world, uplifting the marginalized, fostering love and empathy, and urging us all to be stewards of justice and peace. Just as Jesus inspired His followers to lead with compassion and integrity, we too must inspire the youth to engage in shaping the future with love, responsibility, and accountability.

While celebrating achievements, we acknowledge the pressing challenges that hinder youth progress, such as drug and substance abuse, unemployment, lack of access to quality education, limited participation in decision-making, and the harmful influence of social media and disinformation. The following recommendations are made:

1.Prioritize the National Youth Bill: Parliament should expedite the passage and implementation of the National Youth Bill to safeguard youth rights and opportunities.

2.Encourage Youth Participation: Young people should seize available opportunities and actively engage in decision-making processes, particularly through local platforms such as Ward Development Committees (WADCOs) and Village Development Committees (VIDCOs).

3.Consultation on National Development Strategy: Ensure young people actively participate in shaping economic policies under the National Development Strategy (NDS) 2.

4.Vocational Training Opportunities: Ensure vocational training centers are free from political influence and allow equal access to education and skills development.

5.Inclusive Opportunities: Civil society organizations (CSOs) and political parties should create inclusive spaces where all youth, regardless of gender, age, or background, can participate meaningfully.

6.Government Action on Drugs: Strengthen measures to combat drug abuse through enhanced law enforcement and rehabilitation programs.

7.Faith and Mentorship Programs: Churches and religious institutions should expand mentorship initiatives, providing spiritual and practical guidance to young people.

8.Combat Disinformation and Digital Literacy: Promote initiatives that teach critical thinking and digital literacy to help young people navigate social media responsibly, recognizing disinformation and its impact on mental

health.

As we commemorate the Robert Mugabe National Youth Day, let us honor and celebrate the youth by committing to creating an environment where they can thrive, grow, and fully exercise their rights. The future of Zimbabwe is in the hands of its young people, and as a nation, we must nurture and empower them to build a better, brighter tomorrow. With faith, unity, and action, we can ensure that the promise to “Empower Youth, Secure the Future” becomes a reality for all.

