

'For ALL Women and Girls, Rights, Equality, Empowerment'

Galatians 3:28

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The Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) joins the rest of the World in commemorating International Women's Day (IWD). This year's theme, "For ALL Women and Girls: Rights, Equality, Empowerment," resonates deeply with our faith's core principles of justice, compassion, and equality. As followers of Christ, we affirm the inherent dignity and worth of every human being, created in the image of God.

Women and girls are the backbone of our communities, playing a pivotal role in shaping our collective future. The Bible teaches us in Genesis 1:27: "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." This scripture emphasizes the equal value and worth of both men and women. Galatians 3:28 further reinforces this truth: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." In this regard, the ZCC affirms that men and women are equal in the eyes of the Lord and must be treated as such in all spheres of life.

We recognize the significant strides made locally, regionally, and internationally in advocating for women's rights. Zimbabwe's Constitution, particularly Section 17, enshrines gender equality as a fundamental right, guaranteeing equal opportunities for both men and women. Instruments such as the Maputo Protocol, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, and Goal 5 of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development all affirm the rights of women to equality, justice, and non-discrimination.

As we celebrate this day, we note that gender inequality remains pervasive, with significant gaps in policy implementation, enforcement, and access to justice, particularly for women and girls in rural and marginalized communities. It is disheartening that women continue to face systemic barriers, including domestic violence, sexual assault, harmful cultural practices, leadership positions, and economic marginalization. Limited access to education and economic opportunities further exacerbates the socio-economic challenges women endure. Additionally, the political landscape remains skewed against women.

Women's participation in governance processes has continued to dwindle over the years. A 2024 national study by the Zimbabwe Gender Commission on Violence Against Women in Politics further revealed that the Women's Quota has, paradoxically, become an avenue for gender-based violence, particularly in the Senate party list and the National Assembly Women's Quota.

In response to the continued exclusion of women and challenges they face, the ZCC remains steadfast in its commitment to advancing the rights, dignity, and empowerment of women and girls. Through our programs and initiatives, we address the root causes of gender inequality and advocate for systemic change. We prioritize community education on women's rights, engage policymakers to ensure the full implementation of gender equality laws, and collaborate with religious organizations, civil society, government bodies, and international partners to build a more just and equitable society.

Recommendations for Meaningful Progress

To ensure sustained progress in the fight for gender equality, the ZCC makes the following recommendations:

1. Strengthening Policy Implementation: We urge the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) to enhance policy execution and establish robust monitoring systems to ensure the effective enforcement of gender equality laws, including the Women's Quota and legislation against gender-based violence.

1. Increasing Political Participation: We recommend that Parliament incorporate provisions into the Gender Equality Bill requiring the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) to register only those political parties that meet a specified percentage of women candidates. This will ensure greater gender equality in political representation and provide a comprehensive solution to addressing gender disparities in politics.

2. Combating Gender-Based Violence (GBV): A multi-faceted approach is necessary, including increased public awareness, strengthened legal protections, enhanced support for survivors, and stringent measures to hold perpetrators accountable. Faith-based organizations must play a proactive role in providing healing, counseling, and support for survivors.

3. Enhancing Education and Economic Opportunities: We urge the GoZ and NGOs to invest in initiatives that eliminate barriers to education, especially in rural and marginalized communities. Expanding economic opportunities for women, particularly in agriculture and small-scale enterprises, will help bridge socio-economic disparities.

4. Fostering Collaboration and Accountability: We encourage sustained partnerships between government, civil society, religious organizations, and international stakeholders to promote gender equality. The private sector must also be held accountable for ensuring equal opportunities and fair treatment of women in the workplace.

Conclusion

The ZCC remains resolute in its commitment to fostering an environment where women and girls can thrive, realizing their full potential and contributing to the well-being of their communities. True empowerment can only be achieved when we uphold the equal dignity, rights, and opportunities of all, as God intended. Together, we must work towards a future where justice and equality prevail for ALL women and girls.