

STATEMENT ON THE CHURCH AND THE PUBLIC SPACE

Breaking Walls, Building Bridges, and Projecting the Future

John 17:6-11.

4 March 2025

In the providence of God, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) formerly the Christian Council of Rhodesia (CCR) was established on 29 July 1964 to affirm the Prophetic presence of the Church in the lives of God's people. Reflecting on 60 years of prophetic witness in Zimbabwe, ZCC professes its unfaltering resolve to remain true to its calling of prophetic presence that promotes a better and inclusive future, one that will enable it to continue nurturing a culture of peace, justice, prosperity, and reconciliation in Zimbabwe.

Recognising the unfathomable social, economic, political, environmental and other challenges the country is facing as characterised by a highly polarised and hurting society; and informed by our theological and historical mandate we herewith explore the prevailing context in the country, provide a theological justification, and proffer a prophetic Christian position on Church unity; Reconciliation towards a just peace and social cohesion; Constitutionalism, Rule of Law and good governance; Developing an Economy of life; Climate Justice and Environmental Stewardship; and Digitalisation, social media and misinformation.

Theological Rationale

The role of the church in public life is grounded in biblical principles. As stewards of God's creation, we are called to advocate for justice (Isaiah 1:17), promote peace (Matthew 5:9), and seek the welfare of our communities (Jeremiah 29:7). Our mission is to be the light in the darkness (Matthew 5:14-16) and to uphold human dignity, as every individual is made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). The prophetic presence of the church is anchored in the belief that all of creation is God's, and the church has a divine mandate to care for it. We are reminded in Micah 6:8 that God requires us to "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God." This verse serves as a blueprint for our engagement in the complex realities facing Zimbabwe today. It is imperative that we exercise our prophetic voice in areas critical to our nation's development, standing firm on issues of justice, peace, and integrity.

Our Context

In our reflection of the context in our Country we have noted with great concern the unprecedented realities of pain, hurt, and suffering that is being endured by many Zimbabweans characterised by several vices that include:

- Polarisation and disunity among churches, driven not only by divergent theology, but also by our sinful nature, egotistic power struggles, alignment to state power and political parties, colonial legacies, economic decline that has led to the rise of misleading theologies and gender inequalities.
- Deep political polarisation driven by a toxic political environment characterised by intolerance of political diversity and a lack of adherence to the principles of constitutional democracy and rule of law, exclusion of women from leadership positions, unresolved past hurts particularly the Gukurahundi atrocities and politically motivated violence, elements of tribalism, drug and substance abuse, and corruption which have crippled service delivery, led to inequalities, and resulted in perpetually contested electoral processes.
- Economic hardships, deepening and excruciating poverty, socio-economic inequalities, hunger and food insecurity; growing in-formalization of the economy, corruption in public and private sector,

all contributing to economic collapse as well as lack of basic services such as health and education.

- Youth and women are disproportionately affected with the economic collapse and high levels of unemployment and lack of economic opportunities resulting in them engaging in drug abuse and other negative coping mechanisms.
- The disintegration of families, social fabric, intolerance, and failure to appreciate our culture and diversity,
- Negative effects of climate change and environmental degradation largely due to mining activities and modern slavery practices largely by foreign owned mining companies.

Church Unity

In a country characterised by divisions, the church must exemplify unity. Jesus prayed for His disciples to be one (John 17:21), and as the Body of Christ, we are called to break down barriers that divide us. Church unity is crucial for expressing a coherent witness to society. We recognize that a unified church can effectively witness to the nation, presenting a united front against injustice and divisiveness. A united church can strengthen community relationships, promote dialogue, and create a platform for collective advocacy. As we reflect on our 60 years of existence, we affirm our commitment to fostering ecumenism, which promotes understanding and collaboration across different denominations to address societal challenges collaboratively.

The Council notes that the Church continues to face unprecedented challenges of disunity and polarization, we re-affirm the importance of Church unity anchored on two biblical texts namely John 17 and Ephesians 4:5. As we pursue the unity of the church, we remain rooted in the deep conviction that God's people, despite all their doctrinal differences, are united to God by faith in Jesus Christ. Church unity is fundamental for a prophetic and transformative presence in society.

In a country marked by divisions—politically, ethnically, and socio-economically—the church must transcend these barriers. The Second Chapter of Ephesians emphasizes that Christ has broken down the walls of hostility (Ephesians 2:14-16). Our unity allows us to present a cohesive voice in advocating for human rights, justice, and reconciliation, thus fulfilling Christ's prayer for oneness among believers.

As a Church, we acknowledge that we have betrayed God and our people by our failure to speak with one voice against injustice prevalent within our society, thereby failing to be the light of the world as reflected in the bible. We therefore humble ourselves and ask for God's forgiveness.

Reconciliation towards Just Peace and Social Cohesion

Zimbabwe has faced numerous challenges, including political violence and ethnic tensions. Historical injustices and ongoing conflicts necessitate a commitment to reconciliation and healing. The church has a prophetic role in promoting dialogue, forgiveness, and restoration, echoing 2 Corinthians 5:18, which calls us to be ministers of reconciliation.

We are challenged to engage in processes that foster social cohesion and just peace, ensuring that all voices are heard and that the wounds of the past are addressed. The church is tasked with the ministry of reconciliation. We emphasize restorative justice as a pathway to healing our national wounds. It is our duty to facilitate dialogue and promote understanding among individuals and communities. As we promote reconciliation, we must advocate for a just peace—one that addresses the root causes of conflict and promote social cohesion among our diverse populace.

We are profoundly troubled by the fact that our country is now characterised by unprecedented levels of polarization than ever. Reconciliation is essential for building a just and peaceful society. Our nation has experienced turmoil and division, and the church is called to be an agent of healing. We encourage restorative justice measures that foster dialogue, understanding, and forgiveness among communities. This process, as articulated in the book of Matthew, emphasizes the importance of reconciling with one another in pursuit of peace.

Lack of shared national values and identity drives the deep polarisation and fragmentation, further fuelled by political, ethnicity and intergenerational differences. The challenge for Christians is to embrace and continue the mission of Christ, which is centred around justice, reconciliation, actively promoting peace and understanding within their communities.

There is a crucial need for collective acknowledgment of our roles within existing systems and structures that perpetuate injustice, to foster an environment conducive to reconciliation and social cohesion. In this regard, as the Church, we commit to a programme on Church and Community Reconciliation Mission (CCRM) towards fostering just peace and reconciliation for a cohesive society where people will live and have life abundantly.

Constitutionalism, Rule of Law and Good Governance

Zimbabwe's constitutional framework embodies principles of justice, equality, and respect for human rights. The church calls for the respect of the Constitution and the rule of law. This is not only a legal imperative but a theological one; our faith demands that we uphold justice as a reflection of God's character. We call upon the government and all citizens to respect constitutional provisions, ensuring that justice prevails for all.

As the church, we advocate for the upholding of the Constitution, the rule of law, and good governance. This necessitates a commitment to transparency and accountability in governance. We urge the government and all leaders to ensure that policies promote inclusivity and protect the rights of all Zimbabweans, particularly the marginalized.

As a country, we find ourselves in a situation where our Constitution and Constitutional Democracy have become nothing more than instruments of protecting and enriching a few individuals, devoid of significance for the vast majority and the ethos of Zimbabwe's war of liberation. Those entrusted with upholding our Constitution are failing the nation. Our trust in political leadership across the political divide has eroded, along with our confidence in the state institutions of our democracy, parliament and the judiciary.

The prophetic voice of the church encourages citizens to engage actively in civic duties, exercising their rights responsibly and advocating for leaders who reflect Christ's values of service, humility, and righteousness. By fostering good governance, we cultivate a culture of trust and accountability in our nation.

We need to work towards having citizens adopt constitutionalism as a value system in our nation so as to enforce transparency and accountability at all levels of society. We acknowledge the urgency of building the capacity of our citizens on their knowledge of the Constitution and their role in exercising their rights and responsibilities in respecting constitutionalism, rule of law and fostering good governance.

The ZCC commits itself towards a vibrant programme to protect, defend and enforce the upholding of the Zimbabwean constitution, ensuring that Government is transparent and accountable to the people and not vice-versa.

Our people will need to be aware and demand their constitutionally provided rights as we envision an abundant life for all Zimbabweans. As the Church, we shall engage the government when the constitution is violated

Our Constitutionalism, Rule of Law and Good Governance programme shall seek to:

- Promote citizen awareness and amplify ordinary citizens' voices on Constitutionalism and Rule of Law;
- Build the capacities of Church leaders and structures to be conversant with Zimbabwe's constitutionally provided national values. National values should be our foundation for engagement. Church leaders will exercise and encourage transformational leadership when they engage with secular authority for the common good.
- Empower the people of Zimbabwe and build their capacities to demand their rights and foster governance and the rule of law.
- The Church will constructively, prophetically, and critically engage with the political power holders and duty bearers, speak truth to power when injustices, repression and violation of the constitution manifest in our Society (Proverbs 31:8-9).

Developing an economy of life

Key socio-economic challenges impacting Zimbabwe and its communities include economic instability, poverty and inequality, public debt and fiscal pressures, poor health and social services.

The Church notes that Zimbabwe has a diverse and well-endowed economy comprising four key sectors featuring mining, manufacturing, agriculture and tourism among others. Our economy has the potential to support and sustain all Zimbabweans to live a normal life, live out of poverty and economically fulfilling lives. Economic justice is a theological imperative. We promote, contribute and advocate for an economy that prioritizes the dignity of the person and the common good. The church will engage in dialogue about economic policies that promote equitable distribution of resources and create opportunities for the marginalized. In light of the Biblical principle (Deuteronomy 15:4), we envision an economy where all flourish, reflecting God's intention for abundant life.

In line with God's design for creation, we call and advocate for an economy that reflects justice and equity. The Biblical model of stewardship calls for the responsible management of resources so that all people can flourish (Genesis 1:28-30). We urge the government and private sectors to prioritize social welfare and equitable distribution of resources, ensuring that development initiatives serve the interests of all, particularly marginalized communities.

We commit ourselves as a Church to engage in sustained theological engagement, that seeks to do away with the promotion of individualism and avarice, but affirm human dignity. The Church will seek to foster engagement to address the social impacts of retrenchments, rising poverty, increasing inequality, growing impunity, corruption, lack of accountability among others. The engagement with these social and economic issues and the public space shall be based on comprehensive theology of development and human reconstruction.

On Digitalization, Social Media and Misinformation

In an increasingly digital world, the church must engage with the realities of digitalisation, social media and the impacts of misinformation. This presents both challenges and opportunities for the ministry. The prophetic presence of the church involves promoting digital literacy, ethical communication, and truth-telling. We must harness these platforms for positive engagement, sharing messages of hope, truth, and love while combating falsehoods that distort reality and harm social cohesion

We recognize the potential of digital platforms for evangelism and community building but also understand the risks associated with misinformation and divisive rhetoric. We advocate for digital literacy programs within our communities to empower individuals to discern truth from falsehood and to use digital platforms responsibly.

On Climate Justice and Environmental Stewardship

The call for climate justice is urgent as we face the realities of climate change and environmental degradation. The church has a responsibility to advocate for stewardship of God's creation, emphasizing that our care for the environment is a spiritual mandate. We encourage the government, businesses, and communities to embrace sustainable practices that protect our ecosystem, ensuring a habitable planet for future generations.

In a time where climate change poses existential threats, the church must stand firm in advocating for climate justice and environmental stewardship (Psalm 24:1). We call for sustainable practices that reflect our stewardship of God's creation. As a prophetic voice, we urge the Zimbabwean government to adopt environmentally sustainable policies that protect our natural heritage while addressing the needs of vulnerable communities.

The Church acknowledges that it has not been sufficiently actively or consistently engaged with the issue of climate change and environmental stewardship, despite its moral and ethical implications. The church recognizes that human activities are the primary drivers of climate change such as irresponsible mining as well as poor agricultural practices

There is a need to increase public awareness about the causes and consequences of climate change and empower communities to act. The urgency of the climate crisis demands immediate action to mitigate its impacts and adapt to the changing environment. Thus, the ZCC will adopt a comprehensive Climate Change and Environmental stewardship mission towards a just and climate sensitive society.

Our Commitment

As ZCC we reaffirm our unfaltering commitment to our Prophetic presence and accompany the people and leadership of our beloved Country in an inclusive National Dialogue process as we seek to break the walls that are dividing us, build bridges and together build a united, peaceful, just and prosperous nation, where all citizens experience holistic salvation. We further commit ourselves to regular prayer and meditation, asking for God's wisdom, discernment and courage as we continue speaking truth to power and prophetically Witness to the state of our nation.

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