



Applaud To Zambian Government Stand on Zimbabwe and Concerns on Current Arrests and Torture of Political and Human Rights Activists

Press Statement

The Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation (CHRR), Centre for Children Affairs, (CEYCA), Civil Liberties Committee (CILIC) and Christian Agency for Responsible Democracy and Unity (CARDDENU) applaud the Zambian government for taking a firm stand against the deteriorating of state of affairs in Zimbabwe. It is evident that the Zambian government this time around has broken ranks with the region on the meltdown by acknowledging the serious problems in Zimbabwe and the need for intervention by the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC).

We note with utter respect the recent remarks made by Zambian Foreign Affairs Minister Mundia Sikatana to SADC Executive Secretary Thomaz Salomao in Lusaka indicating that Zambia was acutely affected by the political and economic collapse of its neighbor taking into consideration the hordes of Zimbabweans streaming daily into Zambia in search of a livelihood.

It is clear that Zimbabwe is exporting poverty into the region and beyond, forcing the poorest and most materially deprived communities in the region to host displaced Zimbabweans. The versatile crisis gripping Zimbabwe is therefore not only a national crisis but also a regional one. Consequently, the massive external displacement of Zimbabweans into the region has to be addressed if the SADC goals on poverty alleviation are to be realized.

It is also important to note the enthusiasm with which the Zambian government has cautioned its SADC counterparts on their silence over the political and economic situation in Zimbabwe.

As observed in the past, Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation (CHRR) in conjunction with Centre for Children Affairs, (CEYCA), Civil Liberties Committee (CILIC) and Christian Agency for Responsible Democracy and Unity (CARDDENU) are concerned with the deterioration of political and economic situation in Zimbabwe. We are also alarmed by the introduction of draconian laws such as the Public Order and Security Act, Miscellaneous Offences Act, Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, NGO Law and the Interception Communication Law, which infringes on fundamental rights and freedoms and civil liberties of ordinary.

Some time last year, we cited the SADC leaders August 2001 communiqué following the Blantyre summit of SADC heads of state expressing apprehension on the effects of political and economic situation in Zimbabwe on the region. The summit appointed a task force to work with the Zimbabwean government on the issues, however little or nothing has materialized to remedy the situation.

As concerned civil society, we feel time is ripe to build on the resolutions agreed by condemning in no uncertain terms the deteriorating human rights situation in Zimbabwe. Zambia has taken the lead, we are proud of them.

In addition, we take note that Zambia's stand is a step in the right direction noting that SADC leaders have continuously played double Standards and preferred a silent approach at the expense of the suffering people of Zimbabwe especially women and children, the hunger stricken, and People Living with HIV and Aids.

Concerns have also been voiced in the past on SADC's soft stance against Zimbabwe. It can not be disputed that SADC leaders have failed the People of Zimbabwe as they have supported President Mugabe in championing undemocratic values, rigging elections, violent suppression of the opposition while subverting justice, trampling on the media and curtailing freedoms in every sphere of the society.

We therefore urge SADC as a body to desist from silence and publicly condemn the current human rights violations, lack of rule of law and genuine democracy. Particularly, **we urge them to call on President Robert Gabriel Mugabe to:**

- Ensure the police impartially protect all Zimbabweans regardless of their political affiliation.
- End all harassment and guarantee constitutional rights to all Zimbabweans.
- Abandon and repeal all repressive laws that undermine the rule of law and Rights enshrined in the Zimbabwe Constitution;
- Release all political and human rights activists currently in custody.

We call upon:

- SADC and in particular South Africa to stop applying double standards and pretending that all is well in Zimbabwe.
- SADC to engage the United States and European Union in order to pave a strategy of resolving the crisis.
- SADC to consider convening an urgent meeting to discuss the consequences of the political and economic meltdown in Zimbabwe.
- The United States and European Union to ease sanctions on Zimbabwe as they do not affect Mugabe and his cronies but the poor vulnerable Zimbabweans.
- Our State President Dr. Bingu Wa Mutharika to take advantage of his personal relationship with President Robert Mugabe and take lead in convening the SADC leaders forum. Our President should cease shying away from reality as that is tantamount to betrayal of the suffering people of Zimbabwean and the SADC region.

Finally, we cannot concur more with the Zambian government, SADC should not pretend any longer that all is well in Zimbabwe. The problem is serious and ostracizing Zimbabwe will not help the country and the whole region.

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