



NATIONAL
TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE
WORKING GROUP
ZIMBABWE

Zimbabwe's Legacy of Unspoken Truths

**Press Release on the International Day of Truth
24 March 2018**

"There is no way of dealing with the past without telling the truth."
Commissioner Chekenyere, NTJWG-NPRC Briefing, 15 March 2018

The National Transitional Justice Working Group (NTJWG) joins the rest of the world in commemorating the International Day for the Right to the Truth concerning gross human rights violations and the dignity of victims.

On 21 December 2010, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 24 March as the *International Day for the Right to the Truth concerning Gross Human Rights Violations and for the Dignity of Victims*. This is a tribute to the legacy and memory of Archbishop Oscar Romero who was assassinated on March 24, 1980. Archbishop Romero was assassinated for speaking out against the increasingly savage nature of government repression of marginalized peasants in El Salvador and called upon the state to end the violence against the voiceless and vulnerable in the society. The day has also been set aside to honour the memory of victims of gross and systematic human rights violations and promote the importance of the right to truth and justice and to pay tribute to those who have devoted their lives to, and lost their lives in, their struggle to promote and protect human rights for all.

The Day of Truth comes at a time when Zimbabwe has just enacted the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) Act operationalizing the NPRC. Among the 10 functions of the NPRC listed in section 252 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, subsection (c) mandates the NPRC 'to bring about national reconciliation by encouraging people to tell the truth about the past and facilitating the making of amends and the provision of justice.' This function captures comprehensively the truth-seeking mandate of the NPRC, which inevitably goes hand-in-glove with justice, reparations and rehabilitation of survivors. These are the ingredients of an authentic reconciliation process.

The NTJWG welcomes the national peace and reconciliation process with great hope and seeks to engage the various actors with the desire to make Zimbabwe's reconciliation journey a success. On the occasion of the *International Day for the Right to the Truth*, NTJWG acknowledges that Zimbabwe is haunted by a legacy of unspoken and unacknowledged truths of past gross violation of human rights. These are questions of violations committed during the liberation war, atrocities committed by the state during Gukurahundi, the truth about operation Murambatsvina, politically motivated assassinations and abductions – the list is endless. Unless we search and unpack these unacknowledged truths, our reconciliation process is a fallacy.

NTJWG acknowledges the frustrations with past processes and even some aspects of the current process. It is however our firm belief that the only way forward is to insist on dialogue – to engage the process, no matter how imperfect.

We further take this opportunity to reiterate the call by the people of Zimbabwe at the *NPRC Whats Next Conference* (7 February 2018) for the government of Zimbabwe to show its sincerity with the current process by releasing the reports of past commissions including the *Dumbutshena Commission* and the *Chihambakwe Commission*. The victims and survivors of atrocities of the past and their families as well as the nation at large have the right to know the contents of those reports. Truth-telling is an important step towards healing.

We encourage the people of Zimbabwe to commit to the search for truth as part of the drive for reconciliation. We do this in honour of those who have fought this struggle without giving up like Itai Dzamara, Paul Chizuze, among others whose fate remains unknown. Their families and society as a whole, have the inalienable right to know the truth regarding their disappearance. In particular, victims have the right to know the identity of the perpetrators, the causes and facts of such violations and the circumstances under which these violations were committed.

This is what this day is about and this is what our reconciliation process must be about.

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NEVER AGAIN!