



NATIONAL HEROES' DAY PRESS STATEMENT 10 AUGUST 2020

The National Transitional Justice Working Group (NTJWG) joins the rest of the nation in commemorating National Heroes' Day. This day is celebrated annually on the second Monday of August in recognition of the sacrifices of all those that fought to liberate our country. National Heroes' Day is this year commemorated under the theme, "**Remembering Our Heroes**".

Section 23 of the Constitution obligates the State, all institutions, and agencies of government to accord due respect, honour, and recognition to veterans of the liberation struggle. The Constitution further tasks the State to take reasonable measures, including legislative, for the welfare and economic empowerment of veterans of the liberation struggle. State institutions and functionaries have been implicated in torture and inhuman and degrading treatment, oftentimes involving security agents. Particularly, incidences involving abductions and torture by unidentified individuals have been on the increase. Recently, the country witnessed abductions and torture perpetrated against opposition Member of Parliament Joana Mamombe and MDC Alliance activists Cecilia Chimhiri and Netsai Marova on 13 May 2020. The nation was perturbed when the Minister of Home Affairs and Cultural Heritage during a press briefing on 4 June casually dismissed the disappearance and subsequent torture as staged and fake.

However, this day is not just for celebrations, but is also a day for reflection on the sacrifices that had to be made by fellow Zimbabweans for the attainment of independence from colonial rule. As Zimbabwe remembers its heroes, the NTJWG calls upon Zimbabweans and the Zimbabwean leadership to reflect on the aspirations of the country's liberators and assess to what extent the current state of our country fulfils those aspirations.

The liberation movement was driven by the desire for self-rule, ending discrimination, ensuring equality of all before the law, ending brutality and paving way for a Zimbabwe in which all people have equal rights. As a way of carrying forward the virtues of democracy in a free and independent Zimbabwe, the Declaration of Rights was included in the Zimbabwean Constitution guaranteeing all people fundamental rights and freedoms without discrimination. This year's National Heroes' Day commemorations come at a time when there is a government clampdown on dissenting voices accompanied by widespread human rights abuses which have seen journalist Hopewell Chin'ono and opposition leader Jacob Ngarivhume incarcerated and denied bail for calling upon the people to speak out and petition the government against the government. The situation in Zimbabwe has resulted in the emergence of the **#ZimbabweanLivesMatter** movement on social media. This movement is a call by Zimbabweans all over the world for an end to human rights violations and recognition that the lives and voices of ordinary Zimbabweans do matter. It would, therefore, be remiss for this year's commemorations not to be driven by the need to reflect on how the human rights situation in Zimbabwe should be improved. Such a reflection is necessary to enable the country to dialogue, address the human rights crisis, and move forward in keeping with the values of a free and independent Zimbabwe premised on democratic virtues and a culture and spirit of constitutionalism. As the nation reflects on the sacrifices made during the liberation struggle it is important that the liberation heroes that are still alive be part of the conversation as they are also key stakeholders in peace processes in Zimbabwe and can provide insight on how the country can be moved forward.

The NTJWG, therefore, calls upon the Government of Zimbabwe not to merely commemorate National Heroes' Day but also put into practice the virtues of democracy and constitutionalism. This can only be done through respect for human rights and guaranteeing of non-recurrence of human rights abuses. In light of the current human rights crisis in Zimbabwe it is imperative that Zimbabweans come together through a broad based national dialogue process and establish a national vision that fosters unity and peace in the nation.

//Never Again//