



BUILDING A CULTURE OF TOLERANCE FOR PEACE IN ZIMBABWE

PRESS STATEMENT

24 AUGUST 2020

The National Transitional Justice Working Group (NTJWG) notes with concern a growing trend in the use of hate speech and the prevalence of intolerance in response to criticism and dissent in Zimbabwe. Of particular concern to the NTJWG is that the increase in the use of hate speech and intolerant language has come at a time when Zimbabwe is grappling with a human rights crisis. The outcry from Zimbabweans from different spheres has been responded to with hate speech, despotism, and intolerance, all of which are barriers to constructive dialogue that results in effective solutions and peacebuilding.

Zimbabwe has a dark history of violence and human rights violations which have been a result of intolerance, hate, and discrimination along racial, political, and ethnic lines. It is therefore deeply disturbing for the NTJWG that politicians and senior government officials, including the President, have recently been at the forefront in using hate speech and demonstrating intolerance for divergent views. Examples of such incidents are the address by ZANU PF Politburo member Mr Patrick Chinamasa directing ZANU PF members to use any means at their disposal to defend themselves during the 31 July 2020 protests. The protests were planned to enable citizens to peacefully protest against corruption among other issues that plague the nation. Mr Chinamasa used inciting language during his address which is likely to worsen polarisation in the country and fuel animosity as well as politically motivated hatred and violence. Similarly, the Minister of Information, Publicity, and Broadcasting Services Monica Mutsvangwa gave an address in response to the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference's (ZCBC) pastoral letter in which the ZCBC called upon the Government of Zimbabwe to urgently address the challenges facing the country. In her address Minister Mutsvangwa launched a tribal attack against Archbishop Ndlovu and used phrases such as "narrow and evil-minded" among other derogatory terms to describe the Catholic Bishops. The NTJWG again noted the theme of intolerance and the use of hate speech on the 4th of August 2020 when President Emmerson Mnangagwa addressed the nation. President Mnangagwa warned that he would "flush out" opponents and labelled the main opposition political party a "terrorist" organisation. The President went further to call critics "bad apples" and accused them of acting in league with foreign detractors. The language used by the President is very concerning and demonstrates intolerance through the characterisation of all critics as enemies.

In keeping with the tenets of democracy, the Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of expression in section 61. However, section 61 goes on to state that freedom of expression and freedom of the media exclude advocacy of hatred or hate speech. Therefore, while all people may freely express themselves in Zimbabwe they are not free to do so in a manner that advocates for hatred. The NTJWG finds the use of hate speech and inflammatory language to be deeply antagonistic to all forms of criticism and it shows a high level of intolerance which should be condemned.

The NTJWG, therefore, calls upon the Government of Zimbabwe, all government officials, and politicians to desist from perpetuating a culture of hate and intolerance in the country. As the country grapples with the political, social, and economic crisis it is facing which has only been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, these key stakeholders need to lead the process of respectful and nation-building dialogue. Such dialogue is key to ensuring non-recurrence of atrocities such as Gukurahundi which came about as a result of the culture of intolerance and hate.

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