



## Statement in Response to the President's Engagement with Matabeleland CSOs on *Gukurahundi* – Towards Meaningful and Inclusive National Healing and Reconciliation

27 August 2020

The National Transitional Justice Working Group (NTJWG) notes with concern the exclusion of key stakeholders which include the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) and other Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in meetings that are being hosted by President Emmerson Mnangagwa in Matabeleland to discuss the issue of *Gukurahundi*. The latest of such meetings was held on 21 August 2020, attended by some select organisations. In terms of section 252 of the Constitution, and the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission Act [*Chapter 10:32*], the NPRC is endowed with the responsibility to promote national healing and ensure post-independence justice and reconciliation. The recent meeting and the ones previously held, to the exclusion of the NPRC, side-lines and undermines the institution. The meeting in Bulawayo, on 21 August 2020, about *Gukurahundi* with a minority of the relevant Matabeleland church, and civic organisations is the latest example of this unconstitutional interference. The Constitution is explicit about the role of the Independent Commissions, and, in particular about the mandate of the NPRC.

The Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) was excluded inappropriately from the investigations into the shootings after the 2018 election by the establishment of a Presidential Commission, the Motlanthe Commission. Furthermore, when the ZHRC does manage to appropriately apply its mandate, as it did in respect of the violence in January 2019, its conclusions are dismissed by the government, and the Commission attacked. Thus, this latest event in Bulawayo is evident of a trend by the government to side-line constitutional bodies, and hence undermine the intentions and requirements of the Constitution.

The inaugural engagement between the President and the select CSOs took place on 21 March 2019 at the Bulawayo State House. The second meeting was held on 15 February 2020 at the same venue, with fewer participants. The President was accompanied by Home Affairs and Cultural Heritage Minister Kazembe Kazembe, Acting Minister of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare Joram Gumbo, and Registrar-General Clement Masango. The third, and most recent meeting saw an even more reduced number of participants.

These exclusive meetings raise questions as to their motive and sincerity. Publicly communicated outcomes of the meeting on 21 August include issuance of birth and death certificates to both survivors and victims of *Gukurahundi*, and commencement of exhumations in Matabeleland. However, the issuance of death certificates for victims in the absence of acknowledgement and a sincere apology to the nation, truth-telling and other justice and accountability and healing processes, fall short of the desirable comprehensive national healing and reconciliation process.

Further, while *Gukurahundi* was perpetrated in Matabeleland, the issue is best approached nationally as the underlying drivers are issues of intolerance, which are at the epicentre of Zimbabwe's current divisive and heavily contested national politics. This is exemplified by government's ethnically charged response to the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference's statement that was released on 14 August 2020.

### Against this background, the NTJWG reinforces that:

- i) The National Transitional Justice Working Group calls on the President, and the Government to desist from inappropriately interfering in the legitimate exercise of functions that are the purview of the Independent Commissions, and demonstrate rather the Government's commitment to constitutionalism, and the Constitution.
- ii) The Government of Zimbabwe should desist from side-lining the NPRC and other stakeholders in national healing and reconciliation process, including political players, the church, traditional leaders, civil society organisations, and survivors.
- iii) The Government of Zimbabwe should avoid regionalising *Gukurahundi*, but craft a comprehensive national response, legal framework, and strategy that ensures justice, healing, and non-recurrence of past atrocities.



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- iv) The national healing and reconciliation process should not be cosmetic, but genuine, sensitive, and responsive to the needs and expectations of affected communities.
- v) In line with the recent calls by the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (14 August 2020), and Matabeleland Forum (24 August 2020), Zimbabwe must have a national dialogue on national healing and reconciliation so as to enable the country to heal from the past atrocities such as *Gukurahundi*.

~Never Again~

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