

Civil Society Organisations Applaud and Endorse the UN Assessment of Zimbabwe's Human Rights Situation.

6 June 2012

We, the undersigned Zimbabwe Civic Society Organisations (CSOs), note and endorse the report issued by the United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Human Rights, Madam Navanethem Pillay, at the end of her recent five-day visit to Zimbabwe.

The momentous visit by the High Commissioner, at the invitation of the Government of Zimbabwe, was an ideal opportunity for her to meet and interact with the various stakeholders involved in the promotion and protection of human rights, in order to make an informed assessment of the situation on the ground.

Although the government, through the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs attempted to frustrate our efforts to meet with the High Commissioner, we are encouraged by her ingenuous assessment and the recommendations which she proffered.

Her findings prove that Zimbabwe is suffering from a democracy and human rights deficit and vindicate what Zimbabwe's civil society organisations have previously indicated and brought to the attention of the government on several occasions but which it has refused to acknowledge and appears to treat with contempt.

The High Commissioner's lucid statement is an indictment of government authorities who on the eve of the visit, had attempted to stage-manage the whole process by taking the UN High Commissioner through a guided tour to meet people who appeared to have given a sugar-coated account of the human rights situation in Zimbabwe.

The onus now lies with the government to reflect and carry out self-introspection and implement the UN's recommendations and promote the full enjoyment of human rights for all.

In light of the judicious assessment of the Zimbabwe Media and Electoral Commissions by the UN, we call for the implementation of genuine reforms in the media and electoral system to be a priority. Thirty three years after independence, systematic violations of

fundamental rights continue unabated in Zimbabwe while the lives of human rights defenders remain under threat, due to the restrictive and oppressive operating environment.

We urge the government to immediately cease its practice of 'rule by law', where the State arrests, intimidates and persecutes people using archaic and oppressive laws that have no place in a democratic society.

We urge the government to fully implement all the recommendations it accepted during its Universal Periodic Review. In fact, we call on the government to expeditiously repeal archaic, draconian and repressive laws that curtail the enjoyment of freedoms of expression, association and assembly; recognise the work of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) and fully implement provisions of the 1998 United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders; expedite the ratification of the Convention Against Torture; take all measures necessary to ensure that the forthcoming referendum and elections are peaceful, free and fair and end politically motivated violence.

We appeal to the Government of Zimbabwe to reform state security institutions. These institutions, which have become openly partisan, especially during elections, swearing their allegiance to one political party while being responsible for human rights violations, must be reformed and become non-partisan.

Lastly, we urge the UN to maintain a permanent presence in and focus on Zimbabwe, watching over the protection of human rights of all Zimbabweans through setting up a UN Human Rights Monitoring office.

ENDORSED BY;

Artists for Democracy in Zimbabwe Trust

Bulawayo Agenda

Bulawayo Progressive Residents Association

Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe

Combined Harare Residents Association

Commercial Farmers Union

Counselling Services Unit

Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition

Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe

Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe

General Agriculture and Plantation Workers Union of Zimbabwe

Law Society of Zimbabwe

Matabeleland Constitutional Reform Agenda

Media Institute of Southern Africa

Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe

Musasa Project

National Association of Non Governmental Organisations

National Association of Societies for the Care of the Handicapped

National Constitutional Assembly

National Youth Development Trust

Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe

Research and Advocacy Unit

Student Solidarity Trust

Women and Law In Southern Africa

Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe Association for Crime Prevention and Rehabilitation of the Offender

Zimbabwe Association of Doctors for Human Rights

Zimbabwe Civic Education Trust

Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development

Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions

Zimbabwe Council of Churches

Zimbabwe Election Support Network

Zimbabwe Human Rights Association

Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum

Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights

Zimbabwe Peace Project

Zimbabwe United Residents Trust