

PRESS STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



W/O 3/93
Campaigners for Human Rights

TIME IS NOW! ACCELERATE ACTION FOR GENDER EQUALITY

2025 International Women's Day Statement, 8 March 2025

The Zimbabwe Human Rights Association (ZimRights) joins the world in commemorating International Women's Day 2025 under the theme 'Accelerate Action for Gender Equality.'

On this occasion, we reaffirm our commitment to advancing women's rights and call on the Government of Zimbabwe to fulfil its constitutional and international obligations by implementing gender-responsive policies, strengthening legal protections, and creating an enabling environment for women's full participation in society.

Since its official recognition in 1975, International Women's Day has been a time to celebrate progress toward gender equality. However, in Zimbabwe, deep-rooted systemic barriers continue to hinder women's empowerment and full participation in political, economic, and social life.

As an association dedicated to human rights advocacy, ZimRights recognises that gender equality is fundamental to achieving justice, democracy, and sustainable development. Through our Open Up Campaign, we continue to work with women and girls throughout the country, empowering them to lead the human rights agenda. The Open Up Campaign is an initiative by ZimRights designed to advance the leadership of women in human rights. A special resource, the Open Up Handbook was published in 2021 which outlined clear strategies for strengthening women leadership. Since then, our association has continued to work with women across the country, bringing them at the forefront of human rights leadership.



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ZimRights' Interventions: Advocating for Gender Justice

ZimRights has long been at the forefront of advocating for gender equality through, among other initiatives:

1. Community-Based Campaigns & Legal Support: ZimRights spearheaded grassroots initiatives to enhance women's leadership and advocacy skills across the country. For example, the Women Voices Fora in Sanyati, Midlands, created an inclusive platform for intergenerational dialogue on gender equality, civic engagement, and local governance, while in Hopley, Harare, the Voices Fora for Young Women provided a safe space for young women to speak out on barriers they continue to face, among them, exclusion from economic opportunities, hindrances to legal documentation, and poor service delivery.

ZimRights also conducted community-led civic education initiatives in Buhera, Epworth, Chitungwiza, among other areas, and through these, women were empowered to not only understand, but demand their rights, and to participate in governance processes, and to understand advocacy mechanisms tailored for their communities.

2. Collaborations with Key Stakeholders: Throughout its work, ZimRights has sought to build strategic collaborations with key stakeholders such as civil society organisations, independent institutions and government bodies, with the example of Mutasa, where ZimRights facilitated a Duty Bearer engagement that gave women an opportunity to directly engage with their local leaders on service delivery issues, civil and political participation of women. ZimRights also capacitated women to effectively participate in community budget consultations.

3. Accountability & Justice: In 2024, ZimRights, conducted various advocacy initiatives to hold leaders to account, including participating in radio programmes, conducting advocacy for the repeal of the Vagrancy Act, whose enforcement disproportionately affect women and girls. In addition to such initiatives, ZimRights, Provincial Action Committees have become key platforms to hold central and local government authorities to account on key policies and service delivery issues that affect women's empowerment.

Despite these, and multiple other efforts by various stakeholders, progress remains slow. Women in Zimbabwe continue to face inequalities across various sectors, demanding urgent government action. We outline the following key priority areas:

Enforcing Gender-Responsive Policies

Section 17 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe mandates gender balance across all spheres of society, ensuring equal opportunities for women and men. Yet, women remain significantly underrepresented in decision-making roles, face economic marginalisation, and endure legal and social discrimination.

- The government must accelerate reforms that eliminate structural inequalities and promote gender-sensitive policies in healthcare, education, economic participation, and political representation. Without concrete action, gender disparities will persist, hindering national development and social justice.

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Addressing the Maternal Health Crisis

Zimbabwe's healthcare system is in crisis, disproportionately affecting women. Section 76(1) of the Constitution guarantees the right to healthcare, including reproductive healthcare, yet maternal mortality rates remain alarmingly high. In January 2025 alone, 54 mothers and 300 infants lost their lives during childbirth. These deaths, largely preventable, are the result of inadequate healthcare infrastructure, medical supply shortages, and an overstretched workforce. Many maternity wards lack essential resources, and women in rural areas must travel long distances for basic maternal care.

ZimRights demands immediate investment in maternal healthcare, including:

- Increased funding for maternity wards.
- Improved access to essential medical supplies.
- Expansion of maternal health services in underserved communities.
- Recruitment and retention of skilled healthcare professionals.

Ensuring Women's Equal Political Representation

While the 2013 Constitution introduced a quota system reserving 60 parliamentary seats for women, this measure has not translated into broader gender parity in elected offices. The 2018 and 2023 elections saw a decline in the number of women winning contested seats, highlighting systemic barriers such as political violence, lack of financial resources, and entrenched gender biases.

To ensure meaningful political inclusion, the government must:

- Expand support mechanisms for women in leadership.
- Strengthen laws protecting women in politics from harassment and violence.
- Implement policies that promote long-term gender equality in governance.

Acting decisively to eliminate Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Gender-based violence remains a pervasive human rights crisis in Zimbabwe. The UNFPA reports that 1 in 3 women aged 15-49 have experienced physical violence, while 1 in 4 have suffered sexual violence. Despite the Domestic Violence Act (2007), weak enforcement, cultural stigma, and inadequate support services leave many survivors without justice.

ZimRights calls for urgent government action to:

- Strengthen enforcement of GBV laws by giving enhanced support to key institutions such as the Victim Friendly Unit of the police, and ensuring the courts systems are capacitated to deal with GBV cases..
- Increase funding for shelters and support services for survivors.
- Expand legal aid and psychosocial support for victims.
- Implement nationwide public education campaigns to challenge harmful gender norms, and capacitate the Zimbabwe Gender Commission to raise awareness and push for a culture of gender equality in communities.

Time for Bold Action: Our Call to the Government

Gender equality is not a women's issue alone—it is a national imperative. A just and democratic Zimbabwe cannot be built while half of its population remains marginalised.

