

**ACCESS TO INFORMATION
AS A FUNDAMENTAL
HUMAN RIGHT DURING
COVID-19 >pg2**

**VILLAGE HEAD
APPEALS
FOR A BOREHOLE
>pg3**

Covid-19 WATCH	56 cases	23 recoveries	4 deaths
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Human Rights and Covid-19: What to watch out for

The scourge brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic has had adverse implications on the fulfilment and realisation of fundamental human rights.

The effects have stalled both government and non-state actors due obligations on pursuing initiatives that borders on human rights. Stringent measures to curb the spread of the disease inclusive of total lockdowns and travel restrictions have had undue influence on the realisation or lack thereof of certain rights and obligations.

In spite of the prevailing state of emergency there are certain obligations that the government should play in the enhancement of fundamental human rights. At the forefront is the government obligation to ensure that rule of law and the upholding of the Zimbabwean Constitution is observed. This entails ensuring that all set government parameters and agencies execute their duties in a fair, transparent and non-discriminatory manner.

To ensure effective realisation of human rights, the role of the justice delivery systems and those of independent commission plays a critical role in society. At this critical time, independent commissions such as the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC), the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC), the Zimbabwe Media Commission and the Gender Commission should be at the forefront in ensuring that citizens' rights are abhorred.

Various initiatives to hold all the tiers of government accountable have been done by various non-state actors. Some of the initiatives include holding accountability



Picture credit: Reuters

sessions with local authorities as well as independent commissions. Recent rises in cases of abductions, beating of women and a non-polarised information system has greatly contributed to the suppression of certain rights. Hence in light of that herein below are critical questions that Zimbabwe Christian Alliance is challenging the general public to be aware of;

- Is the government providing the public with timely, accurate, and accessible information on the spread of the pandemic?
- Is the government challenging Covid-19 denialism and actively opposing the prosecution of journalists, whistle-blowers, and others who have raised legitimate factual concerns about Covid-19?

- Has the government lifted all internet shutdowns or broad restrictions on access to information online?

- Is the government taking steps to address the digital divide by increasing the accessibility and affordability of internet access, especially in places under lockdown where education, work, and public information on Covid-19 have moved online?

- Is quality affordable health care accessible for everyone in the country as a right without discrimination?

- If the government is maintaining Covid-19 quarantine or isolation facilities, is it providing people with health care, protection from infection, and food and water?

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Human Rights and Covid-19: What to watch out for

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- Is your government taking steps to facilitate safe access for people who avoid medical treatment due to fear of immigration enforcement?
- Are testing kits and ventilators being deployed equitably?
- Has the government stopped enforcing international trade sanctions that limit access to health care?

- Is adequate protective equipment being provided to health care workers?
- Is the government taking steps to protect health care workers from reprisals for being potentially exposed to the virus?
- Are businesses and governments ensuring employees who work in essential situations such as mass transit, grocery stores, delivery and warehouses, prisons, and at-home care have adequate protection against Covid-19 and access to testing?

Access to Information as a fundamental human right during Covid-19

A brief on how access to information can be crucial during this pandemic

Access to information and the ability to freely disseminate is a critical component that shapes human life. At regular intervals, communication enables societies to deter crucial determinants that enables citizens to realise certain rights.

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, critical flow and access to information has been hampered by lockdowns that have been initiated by many governments. In Zimbabwe, 54 days into the lockdown, critical flaws in communication by government official mouthpieces have left a lot to be desired.

Legislation to curb the spread of fake news were put in place by the government with an emphasis on deterring the spread of unofficial news.

According to the Media Institute for Southern Africa (MISA), the internet is a key enabler to accessing relevant information on the citizens' health and wellbeing, which is fundamental to the country's socio-economic development.

In light of that therefore, the internet should therefore be accessible by everyone through affordable accessible data fees as opposed to being a privilege for the rich while excluding the generality of the citizens, the vulnerable and marginalised communities.

Government regulatory frameworks for both state and private internet suppliers should be tightened during this period. The lockdown period poses an unprecedented challenge to

many aspects of society that has now been forced to rely on electronic communication.

With institutions such as the Zimbabwe Schools Examinations Council (ZIMSEC) and Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA) now urging clients to use e-platforms the issue of data's availability and affordability have suddenly become a human rights issue. With many sources of income disrupted by the lockdown, parents with children who are intending to sit for upcoming Zimsec public examinations pose a danger of missing out due to the inflated data services that are currently being offered.

As the continent celebrates Africa day, therefore the plea is that the government should immediately address issues of data forthwith. Moreover, the government should, as a matter of urgency, come up with data protection frameworks that enable ease and affordable internet access by the majority of the citizens which is critical to mobilising the greatest numbers in the fight against Covid-19.

Concerted efforts by private institutions to disseminate and enable citizens to access information have been overall satisfactory. Besides fully utilising social media platforms such as Whatsapp, Facebook and Twitter, many institutions have come up with in-house newsletter publications that they circulate within their jurisdiction. Therefore in lieu access to information is key for promotion of citizen participation.



Water Crisis: Tsholotsho village head appeals for a borehole

TSHOLOTSHO: As we celebrate Africa day, it is important to remember communities that are struggling to access clean and safe water during this time of Covid-19.

In Tsholotsho, an area identified as Tjefunye, water is very scarce, and people have to walk long distances in search of water. The Village head of that area, Sabhuku Makutula is appealing to the public to help them drill a borehole that will help service the villagers in that community.

In his appeal, he mentioned that he has raised this issue to the local Councillor, but nothing has been done. He said the dams in their area Makutula and Manzamyama are also drying up due to the bad rainy season being faced by the country.

“We have a huge problem of water in our area and as we are speaking right now there are no boreholes to service people and the dams

are drying up. The country is experiencing a drought as there were little rains received in the country, the dams that we have are drying up,” he said.

He said if nothing is done to address their problems people will die as they will not have any water to drink. This becomes a huge challenge considering that the country is fighting against Covid-19 which requires people to have access to water so as to practice clean hygiene.

“If there is any way that people can try to reach us and help us drill a borehole, we will be very grateful. The lives of people are at risk as we know that water is a daily need that we cannot avoid,” he said.

The availability of clean water and sanitation is one of the seventeen United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that were set to transform the world.

Africa Day — celebrations amidst Covid-19

The theme for this year’s celebrations is ‘Silencing the guns: Creating conducive conditions for Africa’s development and intensifying the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic’.

This year’s celebrations will be done in a different way than as usual as most African countries are at standstill as they fight against Covid 19 pandemic. It is happening at a time when public gatherings are not allowed, hence the use of virtual spaces to celebrate it.

Both the arts industry and the Church have embraced the use of technology to hold prayer meetings as well as concerts for the African continent. In Zimbabwe, an organisation called Intercessors for Zimbabwe (IoZ) has taken this opportunity to hold the 22nd National Day for Prayer through which was broadcast live on Facebook, Zoom and YouTube.

Discussing what Africa day meant to youths across the continent, many of them expressed the need for Africans to respect and show love for each other.

“This month always reminds me of how far we have come as a continent and it is all thanks to the legends of Africa. We can make Africa a better place. It is all in our hands to make the difference...and celebrate everyone with love and respect finding unity in humanity,” said Aubrey Chiibi.

Theodorah Chizuze said it was important for the youths to learn a lot from some of the fathers of the African Union (AU) who fought tirelessly to give young people the Africa they know and love today.

“Africans cannot be oppressing other Africans. If anything, we should be standing together now more than ever. We need to take this time to learn the difference between Afrophobia and xenophobia. This is something that we shouldn’t be doing as Africans,” she said.

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African Charter on Human And Peoples' Rights

As the rest of the world joins Africa in commemorating Africa Day on the 25th of May, the Zimbabwe Christian Alliance (ZCA) is running a serialized publication of the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights. The main objective of this series is to raise awareness to both the duty bearers and the general citizenry on the importance of upholding the rule of law and fulfilment of rights as enshrined in statutes.

Today's edition will look into the preamble of the Charter so as to lay the foundation on what prompted the African Union (AU) to come up with the Charter.

Herewith below is the extract of the Preamble of the Charter

The African States members of the Organisation of African Unity, parties to the present Convention entitled "African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights

Recalling Decision 115 (XVI) of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government at its Sixteenth Ordinary Session held in Monrovia, Liberia, from 17 to 20 July 1979 on the preparation of "a preliminary draft on an African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, providing inter alia for the establishment of bodies to promote and protect human and peoples' rights";

Considering the Charter of the Organisation of African Unity, which stipulates that "freedom, equality, justice and dignity are essential objectives for the achievement of the legitimate aspirations of the African peoples."

Reaffirming the pledge they solemnly made in Article 2 of the said Charter to eradicate all forms of colonialism from Africa, to coordinate and intensify their cooperation and efforts to achieve a better life for the peoples of Africa and to promote international cooperation having due regard to the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Taking into consideration the virtues of their historical tradition and the values of African civilization which should inspire and characterize their reflection on the concept of human and peoples' rights.

Recognizing on the one hand, that fundamental human rights stem from the attitudes of human beings, which justifies their international protection and on the other hand that the reality and respect of peoples' rights

should necessarily guarantee human rights.

Considering that the enjoyment of rights and freedoms also implies the performance of duties on the part of everyone.

Convinced that it is henceforth essential to pay particular attention to the right to development and that civil and political rights cannot be dissociated from economic, social and cultural rights in their conception as well as universality and that the satisfaction of economic, social and cultural rights is a guarantee for the enjoyment of civil and political rights;

Conscious of their duty to achieve the total liberation of Africa, the peoples of which are still struggling for their dignity and genuine independence, and undertaking to eliminate colonialism, neo-colonialism, apartheid, Zionism and to dismantle aggressive foreign military bases and all forms of discrimination, language, religion or political opinions;

Reaffirming their adherence to the principles of human and

peoples' rights and freedoms contained in the declarations, conventions and other instruments adopted by the Organisation of African Unity, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and the United Nations.

Firmly convinced of their duty to promote and protect human and peoples' rights and freedoms and taking into account the importance traditionally attached to these rights and freedoms in Africa.

Tomorrow's session will look into some of the fundamental rights that the AU attempts to pursue in its quest to enhance citizen participation and rule of law.



Africa Day — celebrations amidst Covid-19

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Speaking on the theme of this year's celebrations, Star FM radio presenter Nikki said African leaders should work towards achieving the set goals for the progress of the African continent. She said a conducive environment must be created so that everyone, including the youths benefit from it.

"It's always our desire as young people that these sound declarations will bring sustainable development solutions for all," said Nikki.

Delivering his Africa Day message, the President of Zimbabwe, His Excellency Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa said it was the desire of the African continent to achieve sustainable development through manifestations of the of the Pan-African drive for unity, self-determination, freedom, progress and collective prosperity.

"The realization of sustainable development and the great vision of an improved standard of living for our people must remain a top priority. We must drive all facets of socio-economic development leveraging science,

technologies as well as our rich heritage, history and cultures," he said.

Africa day has been celebrated annually on May 25 since 1963, the day the African Union was founded in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

However, this day is observed as a public holiday in four countries only Zimbabwe, Zambia, Ghana and Namibia. Other countries hold celebrations to mark the day but without making it a public holiday.