



**Press Statement
3 May 2021**

ZLHR STATEMENT ON WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY

ON World Press Freedom Day, Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR) calls upon government to make a commitment towards respecting, protecting and promoting press freedom in the country.

ZLHR also calls upon all members of the public to reflect on the sacrifices made by journalists and other members of the press for the sake of press freedom across the world.

World Press Freedom Day is commemorated every year on 3 May and it raises awareness on the crucial oversight role played by a free press in exposing the abuse of public power, emphasise the importance of media independence and pay tribute to the members of the press who have been harassed, attacked, detained and killed for their work in the press. The day serves as a reminder that many governments around the world still censor information through restrictive policies that deprive individuals of their right to information, transparency and accountability.

This year also marks the 30th anniversary of the Windhoek Declaration, which is considered to be a benchmark for ensuring press freedom around the world. This year's theme for World Press Freedom Day is 'Information as a Public Good.' It underlines the importance of verified and reliable information as well as the need to tackle misinformation and other harmful content.

A free press serves to provide the general populace with the information that will enable it to hold the government accountable for the exercise of public power. In the absence of such information, the electorate cannot ensure that authorities will uphold the fundamental democratic principle that public power should be exercised in the public interest. In addition, an independent press is required in order to effectively curb corruption and the abuse of office by government officials. A free press is one of the principal mechanisms for ensuring that the constitutional principles of accountability and transparency are upheld. Section 3(2) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe provides that the state, including all its institutions and agencies, is bound by the principles of good governance which include transparency, justice and accountability. Therefore, government has an obligation to facilitate the effective operation of a free press so that the constitutional principles of transparency, justice and accountability are upheld.

ZLHR strongly denounces the systematic persecution of members of the press by authorities in Zimbabwe which poses a grave threat to the country's democracy, the rule of law and human rights. The use of intimidation tactics, censorship, arrests and lengthy detentions on journalists is in direct contravention of the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of the media which are enshrined in section 61 of the Constitution. The section guarantees everyone the right to seek, receive and communicate ideas and other information. The persecution of journalists and other members of the press by state actors is unconstitutional and violates these constitutional rights.



A free press is crucial as it enables members of the public to effectively exercise their other constitutional rights. In the context of the coronavirus pandemic, members of the public rely on the press for information on how they can protect themselves against contracting the virus and how to effectively curb its spread.

The press has been instrumental in encouraging vaccination against the coronavirus and in dispelling myths and misleading information about the vaccination. In this way, the press has helped to protect the public's rights to health and life. It is therefore crucial to ensure that the press remains independent so that it can continue to perform the important function of disseminating information that enables members of the public to effectively exercise their constitutional rights.

On this World Press Freedom Day, ZLHR calls upon:

- Government to make a commitment towards respecting, protecting and promoting press freedom in the country,
- Government to cease its systematic persecution of members of the press,
- All members of the public to reflect on the sacrifices made by journalists and other members of the press for the sake of press freedom across the world,
- All members of the public to reflect on the important oversight role played by a free press in exposing abuses of public power and corruption,
- The public to appreciate the important role of an independent press in the protection and promotion of other constitutional rights.

ENDS

**Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights
Kodzero/Amalungelo House
No. 103 Sam Nujoma Street, Harare, Zimbabwe
Phone: (+263 8677005347, +263 242 764085/705370/708118
Email: info@zlhr.org.zw
www.zlhr.org.zw**

**FOLLOW US: @ZLHRLAWYERS ON TWITTER | ZIMBABWE LAWYERS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
ON FACEBOOK**

#ZLHRat25