

# Zimbabweans make appeal on film

JOHANNESBURG: Citizens of Zimbabwe have issued an urgent appeal to the South African leaders to alleviate their misery. Their anguished voices have been caught on film by a three-member team from CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, which visited Zimbabwe over the Christmas period.

CIVICUS is an alliance of international civil society organisations with members in 109 countries including many across Africa. The mission aimed to express solidarity with civil society in Zimbabwe which is subjected to severe repression, and to authenticate reports of breakdown of the rule of law and governance structures in the country.

A key observation made during the trip by CIVICUS was the disillusionment with the mediation efforts of the South African government and Southern African Development Community (SADC). The team believes they have discovered a pervasive feeling that SADC and the South African government have not done enough to pressure the 'government' in Zimbabwe to restore democracy and constitutional order.

These and other sentiments of the people in Zimbabwe are part of a film "Time 2 Act" which will be distributed to the Presidents of South Africa, the SADC, the AU and the ANC. The film contains interviews with church leaders, trade union representatives, community workers, human rights lawyers, NGO activists and ordinary men, women and children in Bulawayo, Harare and Gweru.

Observing the total governance and economic collapse in the country, Kumi Naidoo, Honorary President of CIVICUS and co-chair, Global Call to Action Against Poverty, a member of the team that visited Zimbabwe, noted that, "The situation in Zimbabwe is much worse than what is believed by Africans and citizens around the world alike. It has been a bleak Christmas, characterised by despair, desperation and destitution with a particularly devastating impact for women and children." This includes not only the escalating health crisis with the spread of cholera and mass starvation, but the crackdown on basic freedoms and the breakdown of governance structures in the country - exemplified by the abductions and intimidation tactics targeting civil society and political activists, including Jestina Mukoko and her colleagues from the Zimbabwe Peace Project.

The CIVICUS film documents how the courage and zeal of Zimbabwean civil society remains alive, at great peril to the lives of the men and women who work and volunteer with civil society organisations. Ingrid Srinath, secretary general of CIVICUS warns, "The failure of Southern Africa's leaders to fulfil their political and ethical responsibilities is exacerbating the humanitarian crisis and the total breakdown of state structures and governance in Zimbabwe. Through their inertia they are complicit in the systemic abuse of human and democratic rights of the people of Zimbabwe, and will, if unaddressed, cause widespread instability across the region."

CIVICUS joins the voices of civil society in Zimbabwe in urging the South African Government, SADC and African civil

society to immediately step up pressure to restore democracy and the rule of law in Zimbabwe. On 7 January, CIVICUS convened a meeting of civil society representatives including Zimbabwean groups and South African groups who have been working on Zimbabwean issues, to agree on coordinated action.

"This report from the Zimbabwe mission raises issues of utmost concern, and it is clear that there must be a new political impetus to break the current deadlock," said Mary Robinson, former UN Commissioner for Human Rights and a member of The Elders. Archbishop Desmond Tutu is among the prominent civil society leaders who have pledged their active support to the initiative. In a message to CIVICUS, he said, "As the world's eye turns to the mass killings in Gaza, we must not ignore the ongoing deaths in Zimbabwe - not with bombs, but with starvation, disease and apathy. These deaths are no less deliberate than those perpetuated with arms."

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>