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Campaigners for Human Rights



THE OBSERVATORY
for the Protection of
Human Rights Defenders



**Zimbabwe's Compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
Information on the National Human Rights Situation Relating to Civic Space**

**Submitted by
Zimbabwe Human Rights Association
And
Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (FIDH-OMCT)**

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Zimbabwe Human Rights Association

The Zimbabwe Human Rights Association (ZimRights) is a leading grassroots human rights organisation in Zimbabwe, founded in 1992. It works to promote, protect, and defend human rights through community-based human rights education, advocacy, and capacity-building. ZimRights engages citizens in efforts to claim and assert their rights, with a focus on marginalised groups such as women, youths, and people with disabilities. The organisation also advocates for policy reforms, conducts campaigns, and facilitates citizen-duty bearer engagements to hold authorities accountable to human rights standards and Zimbabwe's Constitution.

Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

The Observatory was created in 1997 by the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT). This programme's objective is to prevent or remedy situations of repression against human rights defenders. FIDH and OMCT are both members of ProtectDefenders.eu, the European Union Human Rights Defenders Mechanism implemented by international civil society.

A. General Information on the National Human Rights Situation

Since the Committee's previous concluding observations (CCPR/C/79/Add.89) published on 06 April 1998, Zimbabwe has seen significant challenges to promoting and protecting human rights enshrined in the Covenant. In particular, the space for civic engagement in Zimbabwe has shrunk dramatically, undermining the ability of civil society organisations (CSOs), activists, and citizens to contribute meaningfully to governance and democratic processes. A combination of restrictive legislation, targeted harassment of human rights defenders, and state-sponsored campaigns to delegitimise CSOs have created a hostile environment that threatens the fabric of democratic participation.

The government has introduced certain legislative reforms (*addressed in more detail in Section B*), such as the enactment of the Cyber and Data Protection Act [Chapter 12:07]¹, the amendments to the Maintenance of Peace and Order Act [Chapter 11:23]² and the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Amendment Bill 2022, commonly known as the Patriotic Bill. Zimbabwe is also currently finalising the legislative process of passing and amending the Private Voluntary Organisations Act [Chapter 17:05] through the Private Voluntary Organisations (PVO) Amendment Bill [House Bill (HB) 2 of 2024]³ which has been passed by both the National Assembly and the Senate. The PVO Bill represents a profound threat to civil society. If enacted, it would severely undermine the rights to freedom of association and expression enshrined in the Zimbabwean Constitution and Article 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). These legislative developments have raised serious concerns about the compatibility of the outlined laws with the Covenant.

Beyond the legislative developments, the Government of Zimbabwe has increasingly employed authoritarian measures to suppress dissent, curtail civil liberties, and silence critical voices. Human rights defenders, journalists, and opposition actors often bear the brunt of this repression, facing harassment, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, torture, and intimidation. Institutions such as the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission and the Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission tasked with promoting transparency, accountability, and justice remain severely constrained by political interference, inadequate resources, and lack of independence, further exacerbating the human rights challenges in the country.

Zimbabwean authorities have also engaged in widespread intimidation and harassment of human rights defenders, journalists, and activists. Particularly worrying cases include the case of Robson Chere, Namatai Kwekweza, and Samuel Gwenzi, who in July 2024 were forcibly removed from a flight at Robert Mugabe International Airport by state security agents, arbitrarily detained, tortured, and

¹Available here

https://www.veritaszim.net/sites/veritas_d/files/Cyber%20%26%20Data%20Protection%20Act%20Cap1207%20No%205%20of%202021%20gaz%202022-03-11.pdf.

² Available here

https://www.veritaszim.net/sites/veritas_d/files/Maintenance%20of%20Peace%20%26%20Order%20Act.pdf.

³ Available here

<https://www.jsc.org.zw/upload/Gazette/H.B.%202,%202024%20Private%20Voluntary%20Organisations%20Amendment%20Bill,%202024.pdf>.

subsequently released and charged with “disorderly conduct” for participating in a peaceful protest, reflecting the state’s heavy-handed approach to silencing dissent.⁴ They were arrested together with Vusumuzi Sibanda—a sound engineer who seemed to have been mistakenly bundled together with the CSO leaders. As of 23 January 2025, the court proceedings against the CSO leaders were still ongoing. Actions like these by the state have fostered a climate of fear among those advocating for human rights and democracy. In addition to that, ahead of the Summit of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in August 2024, about 53 of ZimRights members were displaced as they went into hiding fearing for their lives as they were being accused of plotting to protest during the summit.

The government’s approach to civic space also includes the weaponisation of public media to delegitimise and vilify CSOs and human rights defenders. Speaking at the official opening of the third session of the ninth parliament on 22 October 2020, President Mnangagwa vowed to crack down on NGOs. He said, ‘There are lots of registered NGOs in the country and through the home affairs and social welfare ministries we are going to look at the mandate of each NGO. The ministers of home affairs and social welfare will depend on you war veterans, youths, and women party chairpersons to give them a list of NGOs operating in your areas. If we discover that an NGO is operating outside its mandate, it will be deregistered.’⁵ This statement reflects a calculated effort to use state mechanisms and rhetoric to tighten control over CSOs, fostering an environment of fear and mistrust that stifles civic participation under the guise of regulatory oversight.

Human rights concerns extend beyond civic space into broader issues of state repression. Individuals involved in grassroots organising have faced physical assaults, while others have been subjected to intense interrogations by state agents. Authorities have also been requesting sensitive information about CSO employees, including personal details and their activities, further infringing on privacy rights.⁶ This interference, along with increased surveillance and intimidation, undermines the ability of CSOs to operate freely and effectively and contributes to a climate of fear that hampers advocacy for human rights and democratic participation. The erosion of civic space and human rights in Zimbabwe highlights an urgent need for action. The government must prioritise the protection of fundamental freedoms, engage in meaningful dialogue with civil society, and implement reforms that align national legislation with international human rights standards. Zimbabwe’s obligations under the ICCPR require immediate attention to reverse the troubling trends that continue to threaten democracy and human rights in the country.

⁴ The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, Urgent Appeal ZWE 001 / 0824 / OBS 037 available at <https://www.fidh.org/en/issues/human-rights-defenders/zimbabwe-arbitrary-detention-and-alleged-torture-of-namatai-kwekweza>

⁵ “Zimbabwe: Mnangagwa Threatens to Crack Whip On NGOs”, Zimbabwe Independent, 23 October 2020, <https://allafrica.com/stories/202010240005.html>

⁶ Zimbabwe Human Rights Association and the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, 2024 State of Civic Space Report. Available at <https://www.zimrights.org.zw/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/The-State-of-Civic-Space-in-Zimbabwe-Expanded-Version.pdf>.

Recommendations

1. Take prompt and effective measures to enhance and protect civic space. This would include ensuring an environment where CSO members, journalists, and opposition figures can work freely, without fear of harassment, intimidation, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention or torture.
2. Promote a more open and trust-based relationship with civil society by respecting the right to privacy, refraining from the surveillance and profiling of CSOs, and avoiding the collection of personal and sensitive information from their members.

Questions for Consideration

1. What specific measures is the government currently taking to ensure the protection of human rights defenders, and to prevent harassment, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, torture and other forms of intimidation?
2. What initiatives is the government pursuing to create an environment where CSOs can continue their important work without concerns about interference or potential threats, such as the deregistration or suspension of organisations?

B. Specific Information on the Implementation of Articles 6, 7, 9, 19, 21, and 22 of the Covenant

Article 6: Right to Life

The right to life is provided for under Section 48 of the Zimbabwean Constitution as well as Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Despite these protections of this fundamental right, cases of extra-judicial killings of human rights defenders continue to soar in Zimbabwe. According to the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, in the first second of 2022, there were 4 cases of extra-judicial killings of human rights defenders in Zimbabwe.⁷ The case of Mbongeni Ncube, who was killed by ZANU PF militia at a rally in Kwekwe is an example of extra-judicial killings.⁸ Another case of extra-judicial killings is that of Moreblessing Ali, who was abducted by a known ZANU PF supporter, in full view of people was killed and her body was cut into two pieces.⁹ If confirmed dead, Itai Dzamara's case could also be very well be categorised as a case of extra-judicial killings.

⁷ Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, Political and Human Rights Violations Report July to December 2022 available at <https://www.hrforumzim.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Forum-July-to-Dec-2022-Political-and-Human-Rights-Violations-Report-1.pdf>.

⁸ Pindula, "CCC Calls Upon Police To Arrest ZANU PF Members Who Killed Mbongeni Ncube In Kwekwe," 6 June 2022. Available at <https://www.pindula.co.zw/2022/06/06/ccc-calls-upon-police-to-arrest-zanu-pf-members-who-killed-mbongeni-ncube-in-kwekwe/>.

⁹ Voice of America, "ZANU PF Activist Gets 30 Years for Killing CCC Activist Moreblessing Ali," 20 December 2023. Available at <https://www.voazimbabwe.com/a/zanu-pf-activist-gets-30-years-for-killing-ccc-activist-moreblessing-ali/7406186.html>.

Recommendations

1. Conduct independent and impartial investigations into all cases of extra-judicial killings of human rights defenders and ensure perpetrators are brought to justice.
2. Establish a transparent and accountable mechanism to monitor political violence and prevent targeted killings.
3. Strengthen protections for human rights defenders, ensuring they can operate freely without fear of violence or reprisal.
4. Provide adequate reparations and support to the families of victims of extra-judicial killings.
5. Train law enforcement officers and political party members on human rights standards and the need to prevent political violence.

Questions for the Government

1. What steps has the government taken to investigate and prosecute cases of extra-judicial killings of human rights defenders?
2. Why have there been no significant convictions of perpetrators of political violence and killings?
3. What measures are in place to prevent the use of state security forces and political militias in targeting human rights defenders?
4. How does the government plan to protect citizens, especially activists and opposition supporters, from politically motivated killings?
5. What support mechanisms exist for families of victims of extra-judicial killings?

Article 7: Prohibition of Torture, Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

Chapter 4 section 53 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe states that no person may be subjected to physical or psychological torture and that the right not to be tortured may not be limited by any law and that no person may violate the right, section 86(3). The constitution of Zimbabwe is clear on torture however state security apparatus such as the dreaded Central Intelligence Officers, the Police, and the army are responsible for torturing human rights defenders. Zimbabwe is not yet party to the Convention against Torture (CAT).¹⁰ Cases of physical and psychological torture of human rights defenders in Zimbabwe remain very rampant in Zimbabwe. In 2019 alone, there were 50 torture cases of human rights defenders¹¹ while in 2020, 70 human rights defenders were tortured.¹² In its 2021 report, the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission submitted that it dealt with four cases of torture,

¹⁰ Veritas, *Constitution Watch 6/2019 of 28th June [Why Hasn't Zimbabwe Adopted the UN Convention Against Torture?]*, 28 June 2019. Available at <https://www.veritaszim.net/node/3598>.

¹¹ Fair Planet, "Zimbabwe's human rights defenders seek to end torture," 29 July 2021. Available at <https://www.fairplanet.org/story/zimbabwes-rights-defenders-seek-to-end-torture/>.

¹² Zimbabwe Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2021*. Available at <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/zimbabwe>.

cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and punishment.¹³ As of June 2022, a total of 164 human rights defenders had been subjected to torture in Zimbabwe, 6 had been abducted and 12 had been unlawfully killed.¹⁴ In March 2022, Godfrey Karemba was tortured by police in custody and sustained deep cuts in the head. In August 2019, Samantha Kureya, a comedian whose skits are critical of government, was subjected to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment by being stripped naked and forced to drink urine.

Recommendations

1. Ratify and domesticate the United Nations Convention Against Torture (CAT) and its Optional Protocol to demonstrate commitment to preventing and eradicating torture.
2. Establish an independent Mechanism for the prevention of torture (NPM) and a commission to investigate allegations of torture by state security forces.
3. Hold accountable all law enforcement and intelligence officers involved in acts of torture and ensure they face legal consequences.
4. Introduce legal reforms to criminalize torture explicitly and provide victims with avenues for redress.
5. Provide training to police, army, and intelligence officers on human rights and the prohibition of torture.

Questions for the Government

1. Why has Zimbabwe not yet ratified the United Nations Convention Against Torture and its Optional Protocol?
2. What measures are in place to investigate and hold accountable security forces involved in acts of torture?
3. What support mechanisms exist for victims of torture to access justice and rehabilitation?
4. How does the government ensure that law enforcement and intelligence officers comply with human rights standards?
5. What steps are being taken to prevent and eliminate inhumane treatment of detainees and human rights defenders in state custody?

Article 9: Right to Liberty and Security of Person.

Zimbabwe has neither signed nor ratified the Convention on Enforced Disappearances. In Zimbabwe, there is no specific constitutional provision that prohibits enforced disappearances. However, Section 49 of the Constitution guarantees the right to liberty which includes the right not to be detained without trial thus providing an avenue for victims of enforced disappearance and their families to seek

¹³ Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission, *2021 Annual Report*. Available at <https://www.zhrc.org.zw/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/2021-ZHRC-Annual-Report.pdf>.

¹⁴ Zimbabwe Human Rights Ngo Forum, *Political and Human Rights Violations in Zimbabwe, January to June 2022*, <https://www.hrforumzim.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Zimbabwe-Human-Rights-NGO-Forum-human-rights-mid-term-report-2022.pdf>

redress. Human rights defenders in Zimbabwe have often become victims of enforced disappearances, among other human rights violations, to silence them. The United Nations reported that there were 49 enforced disappearance cases in Zimbabwe in 2019.¹⁵ The Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum reported 6 enforced disappearance cases in Zimbabwe from July to December 2024.¹⁶ In Zimbabwe, some of the biggest cases of enforced disappearances include Jestina Mukoko,¹⁷ Itai Dzamara,¹⁸ and Peter Magombeyi.¹⁹ Samantha Kureya was abducted from her home by six armed and masked men who drove her to a bush, stripped her naked, beat her, and forced her to drink urine.²⁰ This was after she produced skits which were perceived to be “anti-government.” Tawanda Muchehiwa was kidnapped and tortured for three days for allegedly plotting to participate in planned anti-government protests in July 2020.²¹ Johana Mamombe, Netsai Marova, and Cecilia Chimhiri were forced to disappear for three days after which they were dumped by the roadside approximately 100 kilometers away from Harare.²² During their enforced disappearance, they were beaten, poured water, molested, and made to drink each other’s urine, a treatment which is not only inhuman but cruel and degrading as well.

Recommendations

1. Sign and ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.
2. Establish a legal framework that explicitly criminalises enforced disappearances and provides effective remedies for victims especially human rights defenders.
3. Ensure immediate, independent, and credible investigations into all cases of enforced disappearances.

¹⁵ Gibbs Dube, “United Nations Experts Urge Zimbabwe to End Abductions, Torture of Opponents,” Voice of America, 10 June 2020. Available at <https://www.voazimbabwe.com/a/united-nations-experts-abductions-torture-opponents/5457417.html>.

¹⁶ Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, Political and Human Rights Violations Report July to December 2022 available at <https://www.hrforumzim.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Forum-July-to-Dec-2022-Political-and-Human-Rights-Violations-Report-1.pdf>.

¹⁷ International Federation for Human Rights, “Zimbabwe: State ordered to pay 150,000USD reparation to Jestina Mukoko,” 12 October 2018. Available at <https://www.fidh.org/en/issues/human-rights-defenders/zimbabwe-state-ordered-to-pay-150-000usd-reparation-to-jestina-mukoko>.

¹⁸ Amnesty International, “Zimbabwe: Authorities must reveal whereabouts of prodemocracy activist and journalist forcibly disappeared nine years ago”, 7 March 2024. Available at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/03/zimbabwe-authorities-must-reveal-whereabouts-of-prodemocracy-activist-and-journalist-forcibly-disappeared-nine-years-ago/>.

¹⁹ Amnesty International Zimbabwe, “Medical Doctor Found Alive But Tortured: Peter Magombeyi,” 23 October 2019. Available at <https://www.amnesty.org.zw/2019/10/medical-doctor-found-alive-but-tortured-peter-magombeyi/>.

²⁰ Allison, Simon. “You Are Too Young to Mock the Government’: Zimbabwean Comedian Relives Her Abduction,” Mail & Guardian, 4 December 2019. Available at <https://mg.co.za/article/2019-12-04-00-you-are-too-young-to-mock-the-government-zimbabwean-comedian-relives-her-abduction/>.

²¹ Zimbabwe Human Rights Association, “Summary of How Tawanda Muchehiwa Came into the Hands of the State,” 7 August 2020. Available at <https://www.zimrights.org.zw/summary-of-how-tawanda-muchehiwa-came-into-the-hands-of-the-state/>.

²² See <https://www.icj.org/zimbabwe-icj-welcomes-the-acquittal-of-joana-mamombe-and-cecelia-revai-chimhiri-by-the-high-court-on-criminal-charges-of-communicating-false-statements-related-to-their-abduction-torture-and-sexual/>.

4. Implement a national registry for all detained persons to prevent secret detentions and disappearances.
5. Strengthen protections for journalists, activists, and opposition members to prevent politically motivated abductions.

Questions for the Government

1. Why has Zimbabwe not signed or ratified the International Convention on Enforced Disappearances?
2. What measures are in place to ensure state security forces do not engage in abductions and disappearances?
3. How does the government respond to allegations of enforced disappearances, and what steps are taken to locate missing persons?
4. What legal recourse do families of disappeared persons have, and how can they seek justice?
5. What reforms are being implemented to prevent the use of enforced disappearances as a tool of repression?

Article 19: Right to Freedom of Expression

Zimbabwe's civic space is increasingly constrained by a series of legislative reforms and enactments that collectively restrict freedom of expression and civil society operations. The **PVO Bill**, is at the forefront of concerns due to its far-reaching implications for CSOs. The ZimRights [analysis](#) of the PVO Bill outlines 10 reasons why the Bill is bad for the people of Zimbabwe in its current form, including that the Bill pretends to solve a problem that does not exist and instead focuses on constraining legitimate CSO operations while it should be safeguarding civic space and bridging the gap between state and non-state actors. The Bill imposes onerous registration requirements and grants authorities extensive powers to suspend or deregister organisations, severely curtailing the ability of grassroots and community-based organisations (CBOs) to operate effectively. These organisations are vital for promoting civic engagement, advocating for human rights, and building resilient communities by fostering citizen participation in governance, protecting marginalised groups, and providing essential services to vulnerable populations.

The PVO Bill is part of a broader trend of restrictive legal reforms that threaten civic space and undermine freedom of expression. For example:

- The **Maintenance of Peace and Order Act** (formerly the Public Order and Security Act [Chapter 11:17]) which was passed in August 2019 imposes strict regulations on public gatherings. Section 7 requires prior police approval for demonstrations, which often leads to arbitrary denials and suppression of dissent.
- The **Criminal Law** as amended in 2023 criminalises actions or speech deemed to damage the sovereignty of Zimbabwe. The vague nature of the crime enables the prosecution of dissent and government criticism which disproportionately affects CSOs and HRDs who are critical of the government of Zimbabwe.

- The **Cyber and Data Protection Act** enacted in March 2022 also has some concerning provisions. Particularly section 35 which amends the Criminal Law to introduce broad cyber-related offenses such as "transmission of data messages inciting violence or damage to property" and "cyber-bullying and harassment." These provisions allow for expanded state surveillance of online activities, potentially targeting activists and suppressing dissent through the monitoring and collection of data from individuals' online communications.

These laws create a climate of fear and repression, deterring political discourse, protest, and advocacy for democratic rights and freedoms. Beyond the laws that restrict the enjoyment of the right to freedom of expression are practices such as the harassment of HRDs that make it difficult for them to exercise their freedom of expression. ZimRights [2024 State of Civic Space Report](#) details the story of Mr Moyo a community HRD targeted for challenging abuses of authority by traditional leaders in his rural area.²³ The harassment escalated to the point where Mr. Moyo was forced to flee his home to safeguard himself and his family.

Recommendations

1. Stop the process of amending the PVO Bill and review the PVO Act to ensure it aligns with international standards, protecting the independence and operations of CSOs.
2. Revise the Maintenance of Peace and Order Act (MOPA) to guarantee that regulations on public gatherings respect the right to freedom of expression and assembly.
3. Amend the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act and Cyber and Data Protection Act to prevent the misuse of these laws to target activists, journalists, and human rights defenders.
4. Establish safeguards to protect online freedom of expression and prevent state surveillance of activists and citizens.

Questions for Consideration

1. What steps has the government taken to ensure that the PVO Bill complies with international human rights standards and does not impede the operations of civil society?
2. How does the government ensure that legal frameworks like MOPA are not used arbitrarily to suppress public gatherings and dissent?
3. What measures are in place to address concerns about state surveillance and ensure that the Cyber and Data Protection Act does not restrict online freedom of expression?
4. How does the government plan to protect journalists and human rights defenders from harassment, arbitrary arrests, and intimidation?

Article 21: Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

In Zimbabwe, the right to freedom of assembly has effectively been criminalised, with a notable pattern of the state suppressing peaceful protests and arbitrarily detaining protesters. Section 7 of

²³ Name changed to protect his identity and protect him from reprisals.

the Maintenance of Peace and Order Act mandates that organisers of public demonstrations notify the police seven days prior to the event, and for public gatherings, five days before. While the law requires notification rather than approval, in practice, notifications are often treated as requests for permission with the police issuing clearance letters only when they do not oppose the gathering. However, clearances for demonstrations are typically denied, with the rationale often being a lack of sufficient police manpower to provide security.

This practice severely restricts the right to freedom of peaceful assembly in Zimbabwe, as the state consistently suppresses protests and arbitrarily detains participants. The right to assemble has effectively been criminalised, with police selectively granting or denying approval based on political allegiance. Demonstrations that are not aligned with the government are frequently disrupted or denied approval, while those supporting the ruling party, such as the anti-sanctions rally in October 2023 which included marches that are often not permitted if used to protest government action.²⁴ This starkly contrasts with the unlawful restrictions placed on civic protests, which are regularly dispersed, and participants arrested or subjected to violence. This de facto criminalisation of protests has created an environment where only state-approved demonstrations are permitted, effectively stifling legitimate political dissent and the exercise of fundamental freedoms.

Several incidents in recent years illustrate these restrictions, such as the arrest of University of Zimbabwe students at different times between 17 May and 8 June 2023 for staging a peaceful protest in Harare. They were demonstrating against the prolonged detention and other persecution of opposition politicians. They were charged with disorderly conduct under section 41 of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act, and subsequently released from custody on various dates between 5 and 24 July 2023.²⁵ In another case, on April 28, 2023, Jacob Ngarivhume, leader of the small opposition party Transform Zimbabwe, was sentenced to four years in prison for inciting public violence over a 2020 protest call he posted on X, formerly known as Twitter.²⁶ He had posted a video calling for anti-government protests over the state of the economy and rampant corruption.

The government's crackdown on peaceful assembly is not limited to arbitrary arrests but also involves the excessive use of force. This was tragically evident during the August 2018 and January 2019 protests, where state security forces used live ammunition and other forms of brutality to repress demonstrations. In August 2018, six people were killed during demonstrations against the delay in announcing election results, and a commission of inquiry, the Motlanthe Commission, was set up to investigate the incident. Despite the Commission's recommendations for improved accountability and political tolerance, no significant reforms have been implemented as reported in the [ZimRights analysis](#) of the implementation of the recommendations. Similarly, in the January 2019 nationwide

²⁴ See <https://english.news.cn/africa/20231026/60dce3570fb04015bea9e5c445efb88b/c.html>.

²⁵ Desmond Chingarande "UZ students granted bail" 18 July 2023, available at <https://www.newsday.co.zw/thestandard/local-news/article/200014151/uz-students-granted-bail>.

²⁶ Human Rights Watch, "Crush them Like Lice" August 2023 available at https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2023/07/zimbabwe0823web.pdf.

protests sparked by fuel price hikes, the security forces responded by killing 14 men and 3 women, with widespread reports of violence, including beatings, torture, and sexual assault.²⁷

This repression of peaceful assembly highlights the government's broader strategy of limiting civic space, undermining democracy, and silencing opposition voices.

Recommendations

1. Guarantee the right to peaceful assembly and ensure that protests are allowed to take place without interference, regardless of the political affiliation of the participants.
2. Ensure that state security forces adhere to international standards when managing protests and that perpetrators of human rights violations, including excessive use of force, are held accountable.
3. Remove any legal or administrative obstacles that restrict the ability of individuals to organise peaceful protests or demonstrations.

Questions for Consideration

1. What steps is the government taking to ensure that peaceful protests are allowed to take place without interference or repression?
2. How has the government implemented the recommendations of the Motlanthe Commission?

Article 22: Freedom of Association

The right to freedom of association is under threat, primarily due to the proposed PVO Bill, which introduces restrictive registration requirements for CSOs and grants the government power to suspend or deregister organisations arbitrarily. These provisions have been widely criticised for their potential to undermine the independence of civil society and restrict grassroots advocacy efforts. In 2024, ZimRights in partnership with the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders produced the [2024 State of Civic Space in Zimbabwe Report](#). This study was the culmination of a survey of 67 CSOs and CBOs in Zimbabwe. Reflecting on the impact of the PVO Bill on their operations, 92.5% of these organisations believe that the PVO Bill will have a negative impact on their work. Furthermore, over 80% of the CBOs surveyed lack the capacity to comply with the PVO Bill's administrative demands, increasing their vulnerability to state interference. This environment discourages civic participation, particularly for organisations working on sensitive human rights issues.

Recommendations

1. Abandon the PVO Bill and engage with civil society to develop laws that support, rather than restrict, the work of CSOs.
2. Ensure that regulatory frameworks for CSOs comply with international standards on freedom of association.

²⁷ Human Rights Watch, *World Report*, 2020 available at <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/zimbabwe>.

3. Provide capacity-building and support for community-based organisations to enhance their resilience.

Questions for consideration

1. How does the government plan to address concerns that the PVO Bill disproportionately impacts smaller organisations and restricts freedom of association?
2. What measures are being implemented to ensure a supportive environment for civil society to operate freely and independently?

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