



Monday, 17 August 2020, Nairobi, Paris

IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE PEOPLE OF ZIMBABWE AND THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS

The International Young Catholic Students and the International Movement of Catholic Students Pax Romana are International Student bodies representing Catholic Students across the world. Our values founded in the bible and the Catholic Social Teachings challenge us to partake in the life of the poor and those who are oppressed by unjust systems because it is with these people and for those people that Christ lived and died.

We write this letter with concern and disappointment over the situation in Zimbabwe. It has been made known to us and we note with great concern amongst others the deteriorating political, economic and social environment prevailing in Zimbabwe.

As young leaders (students):

- We note with concern the deteriorating education system in Zimbabwe before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The situation has been made worse in this time of COVID-19 where students are not able to access the usual face to face learning with their teachers. The students complain of very little effort from Government to facilitate online learning in most public schools as part of the urgent items on the Government's current relief agenda. We are aware that over 70% of students in Zimbabwe are enrolled in public schools where little to no learning has been going on for over 150 days. Although there is a call for subsidized online learning to keep the education accessible to all without discrimination, there seems to be little or no serious commitment or priority to address this. The cost of data is out of reach for most students and those few who are able to access online learning have challenges in buying data which is expensive for them to continue to learn, making online learning out of reach for most of them. However, we have also learned that there are some public universities that started online learning without consultations with the students and teachers yet the institutions are aware that over 80% of their students have no access to internet outside university campus with no alternative to facilitate access
- We have learned with concern about the deteriorating health services in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwean students report that services have become unavailable to many people in the country and young people especially the students are the hardest hit. There is growing fear of exposure to COVID-19 due to poor enforcement of COVID-19 rules and regulations; health personnel are scared to offer services due to lack of adequate protective equipment in public hospitals. This fear is more pronounced in health institutions in the high-density suburbs and rural areas where most students reside. The students are also concerned about the poor or inadequate funding for the fight against COVID-19. The little funds meant to assist do not seem to be used in a fair and transparent manner as this is evident by the lack of adequate PPE in most health institutions. Testing in those institutions is a huge challenge therefore testing for COVID-19 is out of reach for most students living in those area.



- We are also concerned about the Human Rights abuses in Zimbabwe. We have noted with concern the abduction and torture of young people during the crackdown on citizens demanding their basic rights and freedoms. We are aware of the arrests and unlawful detentions of journalists and young leaders who are speaking out and demanding their human rights as enshrined in the Constitution of Zimbabwe. Therefore, there is growing fear amongst the students to demand their basic rights amongst them, the right to education and health services due to fear of victimization and arrests.
- We have been made aware that food in Zimbabwe has become a challenge for many. Food prices are soaring daily making basic food a luxury for most people. The cost of living is high and unattainable. It is reported that some female students (even as young as 12) in both rural and urban areas are being married off to cushion the family. This does not only infringe on the rights of the students to have a future of their choice but expose them to adulthood prematurely.

Some of the above observations were echoed in the pastoral letter by the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference titled: **“THE MARCH IS NOT ENDED”**. This letter which highlighted the plight of Zimbabweans was in response to their call as shepherds entrusted by God to lead his flock. As Bishops and citizens of Zimbabwe, they have the right to speak freely on the situation in Zimbabwe and the shortcomings of the Government with no fear. We are aware that the letter was met with an unwarranted response from the Government of Zimbabwe.

We strongly condemn the threats and intimidation made to the Bishops as they carried out their sacred mandate. We, therefore call upon the Government of Zimbabwe to:

- i. Retract the statement to the Bishops and respond to the issues raised in that letter.
- ii. Restore the rule of law and respect for human rights of the people of Zimbabwe.
- iii. Opening up of space for students to be able to talk freely and advocate for their rights without fear of victimization.
- iv. Prioritize education by coming up with a system that allows for continuous education during this pro-longed time of COVID-19 in consultation and participation of students and teachers.
- v. Account for all COVID-19 relief funds and to ensure health institutions are equipped with proper PPEs to fight the pandemic.
- vi. Total enforcement of the law on child marriages.

As the International bodies representing students in Africa, we call upon the SADC, African Union and the United Nations to intervene in the situation in Zimbabwe immediately.

The lives of Zimbabweans matter.



John 10 vs. 10 *“the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*

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