



**STATEMENT OF SOLIDARITY ON THE CRACKDOWN ON LEGITIMATE PROTEST IN ZIMBABWE AND
THE SILENCING OF ZIMBABWEAN VOICES BY SHUTTING DOWN THE INTERNET**

15th January 2019

The Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum is deeply concerned about the escalation of violence in Zimbabwe. The level of frustration and anger amongst citizens who feel excluded and alienated by the successive economic and political attacks carried out by the ZANU PF elites has clearly reached a boiling point. The spark of a callous 150% fuel price increase has ignited the fires of years of political manipulation, the failure of elections to provide a legitimate set of leaders, deteriorating economic conditions and the growing sense that the government of Zimbabwe has no interest in the living conditions of ordinary citizens.

The closing down of social media and the restrictions placed on access to the internet, the direct result of collusion between private sector companies like Econet, and the Zimbabwean regime, are utterly unacceptable. This kind of draconian action is normally associated with despotic regimes. The actions by ZANU PF expose the ugly face of a militarised approach to governance and cannot be tolerated. The ZSF calls for the immediate and unconditional lifting of all restrictions on the use of the internet. We remain deeply concerned that this silencing of legitimate voices provides the pretext for state sanctioned violence and even more severe forms of repression.

Reports on the ground suggest that the excessive use of live ammunition on protesters has led to multiple gun-shot victims (with more than 27 cases reported by Tuesday 15th January) and fatalities. Eye witness accounts of military personnel firing on citizens and the use of security forces to beat and intimidate people are not in keeping with Zimbabwean attempts to portray itself as a constitutional democracy. The ZSF reiterates that the right of citizens to peaceful protest is enshrined in the Constitution, and must be respected and protected. This includes the right to communicate and to allow access to the internet.

The arson and destruction of property by some sections of the demonstrators is also a cause

for concern. The ZSF echoes the calls from Zimbabwean civic leaders for discipline and non-violent action. Violence will only provide the security forces and the government of Zimbabwe with an excuse to raise the level of repression. Violent elements also provide an opportunity for agent provocateurs to escalate the levels of tension, adding to the vulnerability of protesters, and obscuring the clear and legitimate demands of the protest actions. A disciplined approach that is principled in its commitment to non-violence will unmask the violent nature of the state and expose the unacceptable role of the military.

The Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum is following very closely what is happening on the ground and stands ready to provide solidarity support. In line with the outcomes of the 2018 Civil Society Indaba we will be encouraging sector to sector linkages between civic actors, including the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, the Zimbabwe National Students Union, teachers, doctors and nurses, and the human rights activists and community leadership that form the backbone of those carrying forward efforts to draw attention to the severity of the crisis.

ZSF remains committed to standing with our brothers and sisters from Zimbabwe in this time of need. The ZSF is firm in its recognition that the Zimbabwean struggles for justice, and freedom from economic and political exclusion, are part of a collective effort to advance the struggles for justice and freedom across the SADC region. Democratic values and respect for the rule of law, under the constitution, dictate that the Zimbabwean government acts swiftly to address the concerns of citizens. We join the call for an inclusive dialogue that gets to the roots of the crisis, and builds a foundation for a programme of renewal that will allow Zimbabwe to regain its place as a jewel of the SADC region.

The Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum (ZSF) is a network movement of progressive South African civil society organizations, including youth, women, labor, faith-based, human rights and student formations that are engaged in the promotion of people-to-people solidarity for sustainable peace, democracy and human and people's rights in Zimbabwe, engaged with and supported by regional counterparts and solidarity formations in Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Tanzania, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia and Swaziland.

*For more information please contact Pretty Mncube 071 640 6266 / 011 487442
pretty@asc.org.za*

Issued by the ACTION Support Centre – on behalf of the Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum