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### **Workers' rights violations in Zimbabwe**

Dear Minister

I write to you on behalf of the Australian union movement in relation to the escalating human and trade union rights violations in Zimbabwe. Since our last correspondence to you on this issue on 4 February 2020, the situation has worsened, with the labelling of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) as a terrorist organisation by the ruling party ZANU-PF.

The Government of Zimbabwe is intensifying its crackdown on trade unionists, workers and critics. The ZCTU President Mr. Peter Mutasa was put on the police wanted-persons list in July 2020 for exercising the right to free speech. The military and police often clamp down on dissenting voices, as happened during the 31 July 2020 protest action in which the security forces sealed the country and ordered people to stay at home. Protesters who came out were arrested, detained, intimidated and judicially persecuted while some of those perceived to have played a role in mobilising for the protest actions were abducted and tortured by alleged security forces for exercising their right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association provided in the Zimbabwe Constitution.

We are also concerned by the low wages and high cost of living of the workers and the people of Zimbabwe. When President Mnangagwa took office in November 2017, the workers of Zimbabwe were earning a minimum wage of approximately US\$400.00 per month, but after two years of President Mnangagwa in power, their wages are now a paltry US\$30.00 per month. The Government introduced a mono currency, the Zimbabwean dollar, in June 2019 under the pretence that it was equivalent to the United States dollar. That has been proved to be false. While the Government has now allowed most goods and services to be charged in United States dollars as before President Mnangagwa took office, wages have remained stagnant and pegged in the valueless Zimbabwean dollars, and inflation is now above 800% and continues to rise. This effectively means that workers are relegated to poverty, despite their hard work.

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has just exacerbated an already failing economy. While most countries are taking measures to equip their health services, Zimbabwe's doctors and nurses have been on strike since 6 June 2020, demanding better wages and personal protective equipment (PPE), and the Government has opted to ignore their plight. Their leaders are facing criminal charges arising from a strike action and are being judicially persecuted. We have noted that the regime is now taking advantage of COVID-19 emergency laws to clampdown on dissenting voices that exposed corruption in the procurement of COVID-19 test kits and vital medicines and on anyone exercising the right to freedom of expression.

We strongly reiterate that a political solution is required to establish a new social contract with the people of Zimbabwe to enable the country to move forward.

The ACTU, in solidarity with the ZCTU, has urged the Zimbabwe Government to take the following measures as a matter of urgency:

1. Stop the continued arrests, abductions, intimidation, harassment, torture and judicial persecution of the trade unionists, their families, civil society organisations and opposition supporters and stop labelling them terrorists;
2. Respect human rights and the rule of law and allow citizens to exercise their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, including the right to strike;
3. Implement in full the recommendations of the ILO Commission of Inquiry of 2009;
4. Pay workers with a valuable currency linked to the poverty datum line;
5. Allow mediation from the African Union, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the ILO to expeditiously facilitate and mediate an all-inclusive dialogue to resolve the socio-economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe.

We thank you for your department's response (dated 11 February 2020) to our previous correspondence and appreciate that the Australian Government is monitoring the situation through your Embassy in Harare. We urge the Australian Government to take action in response to the escalating violations of human and trade union rights, and issue a strong statement condemning the Zimbabwe Government's actions, and meet the ZCTU's demands as outlined above.

We stand in solidarity with the ZCTU and Zimbabwean workers, and will continue to closely monitor the human and trade union rights situation in Zimbabwe, and the Australian Government's response.

Yours sincerely



Michele O'Neil  
**President**

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