

ZIMBABWE CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS



(ZCTU)

ZCTU MESSAGE TO MARK ZIMBABWE'S 40th INDEPENDENCE DAY

Today, 18 April 2020, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) joins the rest of Zimbabweans in celebrating the country's 40th Independence anniversary. We recognise and appreciate the significance of this great day to all Zimbabweans and in particular the role played by freedom fighters and the masses to liberate this country from the evil white minority rule.

Unfortunately we celebrate our 40th independence with a difference and on a sombre note. The usual gathering, pomp and funfair will not be there as the country and the world at large is under the grip of the deadly Covid 19 pandemic which has forced the country to go under lockdown to stem the spread of the virus.

As we commemorate this important day and also retrace the principles of the struggle for independence, we note with sadness that the citizenry only gained political independence. All other freedoms and liberties such as economic freedom, the right to assembly and associate remain a mirage. The majority of citizens are still under the shackles of socio-economic oppression and basic freedoms and rights are not being enjoyed.

For millions of workers and citizens, 40 years of independence have not brought positive milestones. Workers and citizens have faced difficult hardships over the years. The standard of living for an ordinary Zimbabwean has degenerated in the past 40 years compared to the pre-independence period. An ordinary worker during the colonial era had a better economic lifestyle compared to today's worker. Independence, which was supposed to be a full package turned out piecemeal. It is a shame and indeed a serious indictment for our leadership that people are looking back with nostalgia and fondness the yesteryears of Ian Smith's better economic conditions despite Smith's oppressive and racist rule.

Ordinary Zimbabweans have spent the last 40 years trying to extricate themselves from the shackles of poverty. Basic utilities like water and electricity are hard to come by and infrastructure is dilapidating at a frightening pace. Most urban suburbs are receiving

water for less than three days a week while going for over 18 hours without electricity per day. Our roads are all pot holes and no longer navigable, hospitals are in a poor state and schools do not have adequate components for learning.

Only a handful of individuals and their families are enjoying the ‘fruits of independence’. The few elite minority that replaced the Rhodesians have captured the state and are plundering the nation through corruption.

Corruption, violence, fear, thuggery, deprivation, segregation, inequalities and repression are the order of the day. The laws of the land are not being fully upheld to protect workers and citizens. Our working environment has gradually deteriorated from independence. Workers in the formal and informal are suffering from repressive and capitalistic laws that deter them from fully exercising their rights.

Repressive laws like the MOPA and AIPPA are still within our midst and civil liberties for most Zimbabweans remains under lock and key. The new dispensation is entrenching repression, the August 1 2018 and January 2019 military shootings shows that we have not moved an inch from the Rhodesian settings. The ‘new dispensation’ must graduate from a talk show and be felt through tangible reforms they promised when they took power through the assistance of the military.

The ZCTU believes that the struggle for independence was fought to free and afford equal opportunities to all Zimbabweans but that remains a pipe dream for the majority.

Over the past few years workers have been subjected to harsh capitalistic realities. Wages and salaries have been eroded, monetary policy changes have impoverished workers and slave wages are the order of the day.

Retrenchments, the firing and suspension of workers exercising their rights is also a mockery to our independence and freedom. Trade union leaders have been arrested and harassed for executing their bonafide duties.

Harassment of workers in the informal economy by the police and local authorities using colonial laws remains a mystery after 40 years of independence. The government is sluggish to react to the situation and accept reality that we have more people (over 90%) surviving from informal economy activities and such should shape the legislation to accommodate such activities.

Workplace freedom has not been realised, the few gains attained soon after independence have been taken away.

The nation is under severe unemployment distress and needless taxes have been imposed on workers and citizens, of note being the 2% transactional tax. Our government has not responded accordingly to workers’ demands. Wages remain

subdued while worker protection is being relaxed. The situation has been compounded by the Covid 19 pandemic, with most workers and citizens under lockdown, with government and employers indicating negative signals towards worker protection; the future is bleak for the unforeseeable future.

The dark 'Covid 19' cloud hanging over Zimbabwe is threatening jobs, incomes and the basic survival of citizens. Employers are indicating unwillingness to pay workers during the lockdown while the government is blatantly refusing to assist the workers. Basic rights are being shredded by policing authorities during the lockdown period as citizens are brutalised daily in queues to access mealie meal and other provisions as hunger stalk households.

As we celebrate our freedom, it is high time we see better recognition of workers' contribution to the economy of Zimbabwe by betterment of their conditions of work and livelihoods. In the wake of the corona virus pandemic the government needs to step up and provide for the citizen. Safety nets must be in place if citizens are to observe lockdown regulations. Basic commodities must be readily available at affordable prices in all areas so that citizens would not gather and expose themselves to the virus while searching for foodstuffs.

We call upon the authorities to ensure the availability of water, electricity, transport and most importantly healthcare should be a top priority to combat the effects of the pandemic. Employers on their part must act responsibly by providing safe working environments as well as paying salaries and allowances.

While we implore on the government to put in place practical modalities that safeguards the health and well being of the ordinary citizens, we call upon workers and citizens to observe and cooperate with health regulations in the fights against the corona virus. Let us all fight this pandemic as if it is our last battle. Victory against the pandemic is the only avenue to open up the levers of the economy.

As we celebrate 40 years of independence, the ZCTU salutes all workers on the frontline of fighting the Covid 19 pandemic for their invaluable service to the nation under tough circumstances. These are our heroes of today who are in the same boat to the crop of freedom fighters, organisations and individuals that sacrificed their blood and souls to usher an independent Zimbabwe.

Despite all challenges afflicting workers and the labour movement, the ZCTU reassures all that it would be steadfast in defending workers' and citizens' rights through all means necessary. We shall continue to utilise the Tripartite Negotiating Forum to push workers' issues but we shall remain cognisant of the importance of the 'power of workers' unity', that we will invoke as and when it is necessary. Demonstrations and mass actions shall be our back pack till workers are fully independent.

As we solemnly reminisce our fight for liberation while locked in our homes, we call upon all stakeholders to retrace the vision of the late Hebert Chitepo, Joshua Nkomo, Josiah Tongogara and the multitudes of freedom fighters that did not live to see an independent Zimbabwe and reflect back to the Jewel of Africa of 1980; evaluate what it could be today and work towards restoration of such.

God Bless Zimbabwe.

Happy Independence.

Congratulations! Makorokoto! Amhlope!

Japhet Moyo
Secretary General