



Police violence on unpaid workers' protesting wives unconstitutional – CSOs



Work hard to overcome perceptions, ERC urges female Parliamentarians

Police violence on unpaid workers' protesting wives unconstitutional – CSOs

Sections 51 and 53 provide for the right to dignity, and freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment respectively.

Hwange – CIVIL society has condemned the police's harassment of protesting wives of coal mine workers who had reportedly walked 20km from town Centre to the Hwange Colliery General Manager's office, demanding their husbands' five months unpaid salaries on Monday, October 8, 2013.

Grace Chirenje, the vice-chairperson of Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC) and director of Zimbabwe Young Women's Network for Peace Building, said the development was shocking as "the police are supposed to protect women's rights" instead of unleashing violence against women.

The women, who apparently came out in a strong show of support for their husbands, were subjected to harassment and violent manhandling leading to many being injured and four being hospitalized at Hwange Colliery Hospital, leading to a collective outrage over the police's heavy-handedness by women's rights activists.



CiZC Vice Chair person Grace Chirenje

Women's Coalition Chairperson Virginia Muwanigwa said the police's actions at Hwange were a violation of the democratic rights of women.

"Clearly, the women had a genuine issue that they were raising with the Hwange Colliery," Muwanigwa said. "It is a sad day when police assault people who are exercising their democratic right."

"The same people who are supposed to protect us when our rights are violated as women are the same people who are violating our rights," Chirenje said.

Section 59 of the new Constitution of Zimbabwe reads: "Every person has the right to demonstrate and to present petitions, but these rights must be exercised peacefully."

"If it is a domestic issue it becomes a big issue, but on the streets we should recognize that it is still violence against women. Police brutality against women is the worst form of violence against women."

The protest by the disgruntled housewives for their spouses' unpaid salaries follows similar recent demonstrations at Na-

tional Railways of Zimbabwe (NRZ) and Renco Mine, apparently showing the desperation caused by economic challenges countrywide.

Government, which is also the standard employer in the country, is the major shareholder at NRZ and Hwange Colliery.

Gideon Shoko, Deputy Secretary General of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), said the Labour federation “does not believe the police must beat anybody” as they have no right to do so.

“The act on its own is arbitrary and should not be allowed in any democratic country,” Shoko said. “Demonstrations are guided by laws and those laws do not say police must beat up people, but rather that they must arrest if necessary.”

Shoko said the police were not expected “to interfere with labour issues”, but defended the involvement of disgruntled housewives, saying the labour laws in the country were too prohibitive for workers to protest without risking dismissal, or legal action.

“The labour law is too restrictive for workers to express themselves even when they have genuine issues,” Shoko said. “For example, for you to protest you must apply fourteen days in advance because of the stringent procedures, you have hindrances when the issue is a pressing one.”

“So what happens is that solidarity strikes come in from wives and children.”

Work hard to overcome perceptions, ERC urges female Parliamentarians

Harare – A CIVIL society organization which specializes in elections has said women parliamentarians, the majority of whom were roped in on reserved seats based on a proportional representation system must work hard to justify their positions as they are faced with entrenched perceptions unfavourable to women leaders.

The Election Resource Centre (ERC) released a report, One Step Forward – One Step Back? Gender Quotas and the 2013 Harmonized polls in Zimbabwe, on October 7, 2013.

“It behoves the women who have entered parliament through quotas, particularly the reserved seats in the national assembly, to perform well during the life of this parliament,” the report reads, “...in order to justify their presence in parliament and to show the benefit of increasing the number of women in parliament.”

“Women’s groups and women politicians must work together to educate the public about the value of having women holding political office and to build the capacity of those women already in parliament to perform at the required level.”

Women had celebrated the introduction of gender quotas with the introduction of the new Constitution, the ERC said, but were disappointed that the cabinet announced by President Robert Mugabe on September 10 had fewer women than the previous one, while all parties had less than 30% women candidates for the July 31 harmonized elections in spite of talk of 50-50 representation.

“Since gaining formal political rights through the right to vote at the beginning of the 20th Century, women have failed to fully break through to the next level, by gaining seats at the political decision making table especially in parliament

and in the executive,” the ERC said. “Often the greatest biases against women are those held by voters and not by parties.”

The ERC admitted that the country had a few known female politicians but their ranks had failed to grow.

“There has always been a strong and vocal core of influential female politicians in Zimbabwe particularly in ZANU-PF, the country’s ruling party for more than 25 years,” the ERC said. “Admittedly though, this core group of women has not changed much in the last 25 years.”



Money constraints were also singled out as part of the factors that led to low number of women entering politics.

The ERC said perceptions by voters contributed to the low representation of women because of culture and tradition that confines women to domestic roles and urged women in the 8th Parliament to work hard to dispel the perceptions.

The ERC report reveals that Zimbabwe is now ranked at 28 in the world in terms of the representation of women in parliament, but hastily points out that it owed this ranking to the 60 reserved seats which are not a permanent provision.

In fact, the report reveals that women representation gained through elections decreased from a post-independence peak of 16.7% in 2006 to 15 % in 2012 before the introduction of reserved seats which upped the figure to 31.5 % in 2013.

The Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition is a broad based civil society network of over 72 active members comprising churches, women’s groups, social movements, residents associations, labour unions, human rights lawyers, and health professionals. It was formed in August of 2001 to focus on democracy, human rights, good governance and sustainable development issues – working locally, regionally and internationally.