

ZIMBABWE CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS



MESSAGE TO MARK ZIMBABWE'S 43rd INDEPENDENCE DAY

18 APRIL 2023

Today, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) today joins Zimbabweans in celebrating our country's 43rd Independence Day anniversary. Representing workers of Zimbabwe, we are cognisant of the founding values and principles of independence that sought to usher a liberalised and empowered population on the basis of Equality, Freedom and Work. We also appreciate the role played by freedom fighters and the masses to liberate this country from the white minority rule.

Our 43-year journey has seen us going through good times that we glorify and rough patches of unimaginable proportions. The hopes and aspirations that the country envisioned in 1980 have not been met and particularly for workers, we are no longer enjoying the Unity, Freedom and Work. We mark this day on a sad note as a result of the debilitating economic malaise that has pauperised the working class. The status of a worker has diminished in independent Zimbabwe to the extent that the older generation reminisce with nostalgia and fondness the '***the good old working days under colonialism***' when wages had value and they could develop themselves and their families from their earnings unlike today.

For the majority of workers and peasants, the 43 years of independence have nothing much to write home about. The standard of living for an ordinary Zimbabwean has degenerated in the past 43 years compared to the pre-independence period. Working conditions which had greatly improved in the early years of independence have harshly deteriorated. Workers are no longer

protected by the law as was in the early 1980's. 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. From colonial slavery workers are now in the modern day slavery savaged by their own kith and kin who now control the means of production and their foreign investor friends. Today local workers under foreign investors particularly the Chinese are no better than the slaves of the between 1700 and 1850. It has become worrisome that our government is failing to protect its own citizens from exploitation while stifling the democratic space for trade unions and CSO's. It is now a crime in independent Zimbabwe to stand up and represent workers when workers' leaders spearheaded the war of liberation in defiance of the exploitative nature of colonialism.

The struggle for independence was waged 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 and trade union leaders exercising their rights is also a mockery to our independence and freedom. Harassment of workers in the informal economy by the police and local authorities using colonial laws remains a mystery. Unemployment and underemployment remain the order of the day but our government is failing to respond accordingly to these challenges.

As we commemorate this important day the values and principles of our independence have been thrown out of the window and are now under threat than before, not from colonialists, but from counter revolutionary gangs and cartels plundering the country's resources without remorse. While there appears to be sugar coated political freedom, we note with sadness that workers and the general citizenry are starved for genuinely enjoying and exercising their fundamental rights and freedoms 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 the citizens are still under the shackles of socio-economic oppression and basic freedoms and rights are not being enjoyed.

Over the years the majority of our citizens remain economically vulnerable. Beneficiaries of the land reform programme do not have title deeds and survive at the mercy of the ruling party which may strip them of the land at any instance. The same applies to rural folks who are currently being displaced from their ancestral lands to pave way for foreign investors. Urbanites bear the brunt of broken down infrastructure. Basic services like water, electricity, roads, hospitals 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 decorated with pot holes and no longer navigable, hospitals are in a poor state and schools do not have adequate components for learning. Ordinary Zimbabweans are now in a war against poverty in the midst of plentiful resources under the control of a privileged few.

The handful individuals and their families and friends 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. We mark this day as the nation is gripped with shocking revelations from the Gold Mafia documentary exposure detailing how the Gold Mafia has been plundering our gold with the blessings of the highest office.

We mark this day as the nation heads into a general election around August. As labour we have a lot of reservations on the electoral environment that we feel will not deliver a free, fair and transparent election. We call for authorities to guarantee a free and fair plebiscite and peace before during and after the elections. The nation cannot afford another flawed electoral process and we call upon the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, political players and other state institutions to act within the confines of the law to the best interests of the people of Zimbabwe.

Repressive laws like the MOPA and FIA are still within our midst and civil liberties for most Zimbabweans remains under lock and

key. While we call on the government to play its part the general citizenry must extricate itself from corruption, violence, fear, thuggery, deprivation, segregation, inequalities and repression by exercising their right to vote.

As we celebrate 40 years of independence, the ZCTU salutes all workers who are forging ahead despite all challenges afflicting workers and the labour movement. 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'. Demonstrations and mass actions shall always be an option until workers are fully independent just like our predecessors like Joshua Nkomo, Ndabaningi Sithole, George Nyandoro, Michael Mawema and Jason Ziyaphapha Moyo among others.

The once Jewel of Africa is now a pale shadow of its former self. It is time to introspect and re-rail our priorities towards ***Gutsaruzhinji***. Corruption, nepotism and plunder are not the values that the multitudes of freedom fighters that did not live to see an independent Zimbabwe fought for. Let's reflect back to the Jewel of Africa of 1980 and work towards restoration of such.

God Bless Zimbabwe.

Happy Independence.

Congratulations! Makorokoto! Amhlope!

Japhet Moyo

Secretary General