



ZIMBABWE CHAMBER OF INFORMAL ECONOMY ASSOCIATIONS

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ZCIEA PRESS STATEMENT ON THE HORRIBLE DESTRUCTION OF VENDORS' STALLS DURING COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

Zimbabwe Chamber of Informal Economy Associations (ZCIEA) is deeply saddened by the horrible, inhuman and ruthless destruction of vendors' stalls in Kwekwe, Mbare, Machipisa and other areas by the local authorities. As an organization that works with and represents informal economy workers across 42 territories in Zimbabwe, ZCIEA sees this action as a silent form of harassment and torture of innocent citizens on informal economy trading for survival.

We thought we are all trying to flatten the curve and respect sources of livelihoods during this COVID 19 fighting period. However Local authorities are deriving joy and satisfaction in the misery of vulnerable informal traders. Whenever there is an outbreak, either cholera or typhoid informal economy workers and traders are blamed as the causes of such outbreaks, now we have COVID-19 they are victims again, their stalls are being destroyed. Why is the public health war on COVID-19 pandemic becoming a war on the livelihoods of the vulnerable urban poor dependent on informal trading for their livelihoods? The action just takes place as a sudden attack, with no consultation. These self-employed people rely on vending to fend for their families. Destruction of their stalls translates to the destruction of their livelihoods and a sure way of sinking them into abject poverty.

The Zimbabwe Chamber of Informal Economy Associations condemns this deplorable act of animosity. Vendors are human too and above all, legitimate citizens of Zimbabwe who are working against all odds to make an honest living. Whichever source of this instruction we believe this is heartless advice which is awful and the worst of its kind in this critical moment of life for the informal workers and traders. To make it worse part of Harare demolitions took place on Independence Day, 18 April 2020. The question comes, is this the Independence gift to vendors? Given the role the informal traders are sustaining this economy, according to 2019 labour force survey, informal economy contributes 84% of the country's total workforce in Zimbabwe and is dominated by women who are pulling through many families from hand to mouth on a dollar per day poverty lifestyle, such an ugly treatment to them is very hypocritical.

Whilst His Excellence President E. D Mnangagwa acknowledges the high rate and roll of the informal economy in Zimbabwe and speaks of his efforts to accelerate empowerment initiatives for SMEs, development, and transformation, the actions on the ground are presenting directly the opposite. The listening ear and heart for people is truly lacking from the associated advisors of this action. This is a catastrophic action and livelihoods destroying behavior which has triggered unrest in Malawi now during the fight of this Corona pandemic.

"The Chamber That Delivers"

For transforming informal economy activities
into mainstream activities

This is just too much for the poor, vulnerable and hungry families to quench. We thought the dialogue platforms we were now having with local authorities are constructive and progressive. We urge His Excellency President E.D Mnangagwa and his administration to seriously and urgently rescue this situation and behavior. We urgently request for this action to stop. The timing and approach are both harsh and wrong.

The criminalization and stigmatization of informal workers and traders must stop. Informal traders are also victims of Corona Virus and they want to prevent it, this is why they hid to the lockdown measures. Their right to food, work and life must be respected as they are equally citizens of Zimbabwe. We urge the COVID 19 task force to protect these innocent people and not treat them as criminals. We, therefore, call for collaborative efforts to fight the Coronavirus and not fight our people.

#TogetherWeCanFightCoronaVirus.

#StaySafe