

EMPOWERING CHURCHES FOR NATIONAL TRANSFORMATION (LUKE 4:18-19)

ZCC Press Statement on the current situation in Zimbabwe

27 September 2017

The last few days have seen many Zimbabweans being forced into panic buying of fuel and other basic food stuffs in the fear that these would run out since shops no longer have forex to replenish supplies from imports. The period has been characterized by anxiety and fear of a repeat of 2007 - 2008. These fears are legitimate since there is no adequate formal information regarding what is going on. In a situation where there are winding queues at the fuel stations, it is irresponsible for any government official to insinuate that all is well in our nation. In a situation where shortage of basic commodities like cooking oil is rife and where available commodities are sold at a premium, it is irresponsible for the government to appear to be blaming the citizens who are seeking to buy as much as they could to secure their long-term supplies.

We, the Heads of the member churches of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, on behalf of our church members and the communities in which we are present, in response to the word of God, we seek to make our position clear regarding the current situation. It is God's call upon us to "Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow" (Isaiah 1:17). What does God require of us? God requires that we "do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). It is on this basis of this theological self-understanding we present our response to this disturbing situation.

We are addressing our message to both the duty bearers - the government itself as well as to the Zimbabwean citizens in general and also the church itself.

To our Government:

- Every government is instituted by God to ensure peace, justice and equal opportunities for all (Romans 13). It is from the consent of the citizens that every government must derive this divine mandate.
- The Government of Zimbabwe has therefore the duty to demonstrate its commitment to citizens' welfare, peace and justice. It must, through the different arms of the state, make sure peace prevails, by appealing to reciprocal actions for duty bearers and rights holders.
- The government needs to address the general perception that the current shortages are a result of bad economic decisions, corruption, greed and opulent living among those connected to power.
- The government must make a deliberate choice to show that it is making efforts to cut unnecessary expenses requiring forex.
- The Government of Zimbabwe must take it up as an urgent matter to address the fundamental deficiency of trust in our society. Zimbabweans have lost trust that the government is sincere in addressing national problems when they see the government officials choosing to send their children to foreign schools and being treated in foreign hospitals. The conclusion is that they themselves have no confidence in the institutions they preside over.
- The government must, as a matter of urgency, seek broad stakeholder engagement to foster confidence and trust. The current situation can only be resolved by broader stakeholder participation and not under partisan politics.
- The government must also note that trust is not built by misrepresenting facts about the state of affairs. Trust is not be derived from coercion. No amount of propaganda can sustain lost trust and legitimacy. Trust can only be built on the foundation of truthful dialogue and transparency.
- The government can hasten this by ensuring that the National Peace and Reconciliation Bill is deliberated on and finalized.

To our fellow Citizens:

- If we allow the current crisis to overtake us, we may end up revealing the worst instead of the best in us. The worst that can emerge in such a situation of anxiety could be greed, stealing, corruption, bribery and violence especially against women, children and the most vulnerable. All these are vices that manifest in situations of uncertainty.
- If we go the route of selfishness because of fear of the unknown, we will make our situation worse.
- Therefore, we call upon all Zimbabweans to remain considerate of one another and taking care of each other in this crisis
- We call upon the spirit of solidarity and sharing to influence the way we respond to the shortage of basic resources.
- When one member of the body suffers, all suffer with it (1 Corinthians 12:26). We need to stand with each other in practical ways in these trying times.
- We also call upon Zimbabweans to dream towards that **Zimbabwe We Want**. Another Zimbabwe can only be borne out of imagination, dreams and visions that are supported by prayer, good organization and hard work. Those who can compose a song, who can perform a drama, who can write a poem, can contribute to another Zimbabwe just like the one standing holding a placard of protest. Those who can start backyard industry, those who buy products produced in Zimbabwe, those who help save water and electricity, those who report on corruption, the policemen and women who carry out their duty impartially, will contribute to the **Zimbabwe We Want**.
- We call upon Zimbabweans wherever they are to seek to contribute to a new Zimbabwe in which all will have access to the goods for their needs and not their greed.

Call to the Church

- The Church does not stand at this place with any claim of superiority. It is both an instrument of God but is also compromised by selfish human interests. For this reason, the Church will also need to repent as much as it calls others to repentance. As the word of God says, "it is time for judgment to begin with God's household" (1 Peter 4:17).
- We have seen some in the Church who have taken advantage of the anxiety of the unsuspecting citizens to extort from them hard-earned money through different forms of religious manipulation. We reject as evil, all economic manipulation that masquerades itself as divine solutions to the current economic situation.
- Church leaders are called to live modest lives and not to be driven by desire for opulence and extravagance in the midst of poverty.
- The Church relates with the state guided by the principle of **critical solidarity**. If the government does well, the Church is there to support and encourage the state. Where the government has taken a course that will endanger peace, justice and equal opportunities for all, the Church must take a position to tell the truth in love and respect for the sake of repentance.
- The prophetic role of the Church derives from God's word which says that "you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32). The Church has a responsibility to speak truth to itself and to the world. This is the moment of truth to which the Church must respond.

God bless Zimbabwe!