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COI QUERY RESPONSE

ZIMBABWE- INFORMATION ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION

The NewDay Zimbabwe in June 2025 points out that: “Zimbabweans continue to endure widespread repression and deprivation, according to a new report by the Human Rights Measurement Initiative (HRMI) which shows that the government is failing citizens on both civil and political freedoms. The HRMI released last week said Zimbabwe scored badly on civil and political liberties, netting 3.7 out of 10 places meaning large swathes of the population cannot fully exercise freedoms of speech, assembly and association. The HRMI right’s tracker the score sits below the global average of the countries it sampled. On safety from the state, Zimbabwe scored 5.7 out of 10, indicating that many citizens face risks of arbitrary arrest, torture or ill treatment, forced disappearance, execution, or extrajudicial killing. “The data revealed repeated arbitrary detentions and credible allegations of torture in police custody, especially targeting opposition activists and journalists, under laws that grant security forces sweeping powers,” the report read. “This supports reports from other human rights watch dogs like Amnesty International Zimbabwe, confirming no respite in basic protection, particularly for human rights defenders, pro democracy campaigners, and investigative journalists.” In the economic and social sphere, Zimbabwe scored 67.8% of its potential Quality of Life benchmark once income is taken into account, placing it in HRMI’s “very bad” range. On the economic and social rights, the report said the country had a “very bad” range.”¹

The *European Union* in June 2025 commented that: “A crackdown took place between June-August 2024, with multiple arrests and reported cases of torture and other ill-treatment during detentions in the run up to the SADC Summit in Harare. Civic space further contracted: the Private Voluntary Organisations (PVO) Amendment Bill neared adoption and already resulted in pressure on and self-censorship within civil society. Towards the end of the year, thanks to the Dialogue on Arrears Clearance, the President has signalled some openness to further discuss with civil society their concerns. In September, Zimbabwe was added to the CIVICUS watchlist. Additionally, it has become increasingly difficult for CSOs to access communities due to requirements imposed by the authorities. Consensual same-sex sexual acts continue to be criminalised. LGBTI organisations operate more covertly following Vice President Chiwenga's statement condemning LGBTQ+ people as 'alien, anti-life, un-African, and un-Christian'. Local organisations have highlighted the role of foreign groups, notably US 'pro-life' organisations, contributing to fuelling anti-LGBTI sentiments

¹ NewDay Zimbabwe (22 June 2025) Zimbabwe scores badly on global rights index

both online and offline. The Government has vowed to defend national values and laws against homosexuality.”²

In May 2025 the *CIVICUS (World Alliance for Citizen Participation)* reported that: “CIVICUS discusses restrictions on civil society with Glanis Changachirere, founding director of the Institute for Young Women Development, a Zimbabwean civil society organisation (CSO) working for women's rights and against structural inequalities. On 11 April, the government of Zimbabwe enacted the 2025 Private Voluntary Organisations (PVO) Amendment Act, granting authorities sweeping powers to suspend or deregister civil society organisations on vaguely defined security and public interest grounds. The new law forms part of the government's ongoing campaign to restrict civic space and silence dissent. Civil society leaders particularly warn about provisions targeting human rights advocates, transparency watchdogs and accountability campaigners.”³

The *International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)* in May 2025 notes that: “In its report, the Government of Zimbabwe maintained that the rights of human rights defenders were already guaranteed by the Constitution and existing laws, and thus no specific protective legislation was necessary. The report argues that defenders, like any other citizens, are entitled to legal protections under general provisions such as the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act and the right of access to courts under Section 69 of the Constitution. However, the report fails to acknowledge credible, ongoing reports of harassment, arbitrary arrests, and intimidation faced by defenders, journalists, and activists. Instead, it downplays such concerns by asserting that allegations of abductions and enforced disappearances are staged or exaggerated to tarnish the Government's image. Notably, in addressing high-profile cases such as that of journalist and activist Itai Dzamara, who has been missing since 2015, the Government reiterated that a reward for information remains in place, without providing evidence of genuine progress in the investigation. Although Zimbabwe reported the repeal of the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the enactment of the Freedom of Information Act in 2020, the impact on the safety and freedoms of defenders remains limited.”⁴

The *Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP)* in May 2025 mentioned that: “In April, the Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP) documented a total of 93 human rights violations affecting 6059 individuals. The data reveals that threats of violence were the most frequently recorded type of abuse, reflecting an increasingly hostile and intimidating environment. Other commonly reported violations included physical assault, unfair distribution of aid, and restrictions on access to essential services. More severe incidents, such as arbitrary arrests, torture, and abductions, though recorded in fewer numbers, highlight an ongoing erosion of civil liberties and the rule of law. Victims continued to experience infringements on their rights to freedom of expression, assembly, association, and access to social services, painting a concerning picture of the state of human rights across the country. The affected individuals included 3096 women and 2963 men. Those targeted spanned various demographics, including informal traders, students, artisanal miners, and members of both ruling and opposition political parties. Analysis of the data indicates that individuals affiliated with the ruling party, ZANU PF, were responsible for 34.1% of the reported violations. The Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) accounted for 24.1% of the perpetrators, while local councils were responsible for 15.64%. The Zimbabwe National Army contributed 6.41%, and government officials 4.62%. Members of the opposition Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) were responsible for 4.36% of the cases. Traditional leaders and members of the Forever Associates of Zimbabwe (FAZ) were

² European Union (10 June 2025) 2024 Human Rights and Democracy in the World (country reports): Zimbabwe

³ CIVICUS (World Alliance for Citizen Participation) (23 May 2025) 'The new NGO law is a political weapon targeting civil and political rights work'

⁴ International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) (21 May 2025) ACHPR 83: Despite reforms, concerns remain over defender protection in Zimbabwe

implicated in 2.82% and 1.79% of violations, respectively. A further 6.15% of violations were committed by individuals not affiliated with any known political party or institution. Geographically, Masvingo Province recorded the highest number of violations with 20 cases, followed by Harare Province with 14, mirroring patterns observed in March. Other provinces included Manicaland (12), Mashonaland Central (13), Mashonaland East (11), and Mashonaland West (12). Notably, the Midlands Province recorded a decrease in reported incidents, from 14 in March to five in April. Bulawayo (1), Matabeleland North (2), and Matabeleland South (3) reported significantly fewer violations.”⁵

This document further notes that: “ZPP notes with concern the continued perpetration of politically motivated violence, coercion, and systemic abuses by both state and non-state actors.”⁶

In April 2025 *Amnesty International* reported that: “A bill that threatened the existence and work of civil society organizations remained before parliament. There was an increase in violations of the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, particularly before the Southern African Development Community summit when the use of arbitrary arrests and detentions escalated. The economy continued to deteriorate in the context of an El Niño-induced drought, and 7.6 million people faced food insecurity. Authorities facilitated treatment for women with obstetric fistula. Legislation outlawing the practice of early and child marriage was enacted. A bill to abolish the death penalty was passed into law.”⁷

This document further states that: “Teenage pregnancy, child abuse, early and child marriage, and early school dropout rates among girls remained prevalent. A local media source reported that at least 16 girls at Monozi Primary School (serving pupils up to 13 years old) in Mbire District failed to sit their Grade Seven examinations due to pregnancy. Women participating in informal cross-border trade in Zimbabwe continued to face gender-based violence and economic exploitation, impeding their ability to exercise their human rights, including the right to decent work. They frequently faced physical assault, sexual harassment and intimidation, often perpetrated by state officials, including border authorities.”⁸

The *Centre for Natural Resource Governance* in February 2025 notes that: “The undersigned Zimbabwean Civil Society Organizations are deeply concerned with the killings and use of torture as a method of punishment meted on artisanal diamond miners by the Zimbabwe Consolidated Diamond Company (ZCDC) in Marange. Ever since it started its operations in 2015 ZCDC security guards have killed scores of Zimbabwean citizens in cold blood on allegations of illegal mining in its concession areas. Abel Mutindindi is the latest victim to die at the hands of ZCDC guards. Abel was allegedly captured on 28 January 2025 whilst panning in the company of three colleagues in Marange diamond fields. The four were chased by ZCDC guards and forced into a dam. They were assaulted heavily. One of them managed to flee but three were captured by ZCDC guards. Whilst under the custody of ZCDC security personnel, the three had dogs set on them whilst the guards assaulted them. Before he died, Abel told his colleagues that ZCDC security guards set 10 dogs on him whilst 10 guards were beating him all over the body.”⁹

⁵ Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP) (14 May 2025) Monthly Monitoring Report: April 2025

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ Amnesty International (28 April 2025) The State of the World's Human Rights - Amnesty International Report 2024/25: Zimbabwe

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ Centre for Natural Resource Governance (14 February 2025) Civil Society Organizations Expose ZCDC Human Rights Violations, Call For an end to Torture And Brutality Against Artisanal miners

The *CE Noticias Financieras* in February 2025 reported that: “Job Sikhala, former deputy of the main opposition party in Zimbabwe, the Citizens' Coalition for Change (CCC), was arrested Saturday along with forty other activists of the formation in the east of the country, in the province of Manicaland, his lawyer confirmed to EFE. “I am at the central police station in the town of Mutare and I represent Job Sikhala, who has been arrested along with other political activists and is currently in police custody,” Tava Gadza, a lawyer with Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR), told EFE. According to Gadza, the detainees are accused of contravening the Maintenance of Public Order Act - a rule passed in 2019 that regulates public gatherings and demonstrations - for holding a party meeting without police authorization. One of the opposition members who managed to escape the police raid, Ignatius Chingwena, also confirmed the events to EFE over the phone.”¹⁰

The same document states that: “Sikhala was acquitted by the High Court in Harare, the capital, last July after being arrested in 2022 and spending nearly 600 days in prison before being released on January 30, 2024. The opponent was facing several charges of publishing falsehoods against the state and inciting public violence during protests against the killing of activist Moreblessing Ali by a youth leader of the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party on May 8, 2022. At the time, this lawyer by profession was the legal representative of Ali's family, whose murder triggered a wave of unrest.”¹¹

The document further points out that: “The August 2023 elections were marked by attacks on opposition rallies, persecution of dissent and politically motivated prosecution of opposition leaders, according to organizations such as Amnesty International (AI) and Human Rights Watch (HRW). Since those elections, dozens of CCC parliamentarians have been arrested for participating in demonstrations which, according to the police, were illegal.”¹²

The *African Internet Rights Alliance (AIRA)* in February 2025 mentioned that: “Article 19: Freedom of Expression & Access to Information

Zimbabwe's freedom of expression online is severely restricted through:

- Criminalisation of dissent under the Patriotic Act.
- Arrests of journalists and activists for social media posts.
- Internet disruptions during elections, limiting access to credible political information.
- Disinformation campaigns by both state and non-state actors, manipulating the online space.

Example:

- In August 2023, on the eve of Zimbabwe's general elections, internet services were throttled, affecting millions of users.”¹³

Under the heading “Article 17: Right to Privacy, Data Protection & Surveillance” the document points out that: “Reports of unauthorised access to citizens' mobile phone and internet records by state agencies raise serious concerns over personal data security.”¹⁴

The *Lawyers for Lawyers* in February 2025 states that: “The intimidation of judges and other judicial officers has become an increasingly prevalent concern in Zimbabwe. Instances of public

¹⁰ CE Noticias Financieras (8 February 2025) Former Zimbabwean MP Job Sikhala and 40 other opposition members arrested

¹¹ ibid

¹² ibid

¹³ African Internet Rights Alliance (AIRA) (3 February 2025) NGO Submission to the Human Rights Committee: (Zimbabwe's Compliance with the ICCPR on Digital Rights and Inclusion)

¹⁴ ibid

disparagement, threats, and harassment have been reported, creating an environment that compromises judicial independence and deters judges from ruling impartially. For example, the Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs, Ziyambi Ziyambi publicly threatened High Court judges because he was unhappy with their decision that the extension of the Chief Justice's term beyond retirement age was unconstitutional. Many legal practitioners highlighted this as a significant point in time marking a subsequent decline in the independence of the judiciary.”¹⁵

The same report notes that: “Over the past years, there have been regular and growing numbers of reports of legal practitioners in Zimbabwe being subjected to assaults, intimidation, wrongful arrests and malicious prosecutions, linked to the performance of their professional duties.”¹⁶

The *Zimbabwe Human Rights Association (ZimRights)* in January 2025 reported that: “Beyond the legislative developments, the Government of Zimbabwe has increasingly employed authoritarian measures to suppress dissent, curtail civil liberties, and silence critical voices. Human rights defenders, journalists, and opposition actors often bear the brunt of this repression, facing harassment, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, torture, and intimidation.”¹⁷

This report further mentioned that: “Zimbabwean authorities have also engaged in widespread intimidation and harassment of human rights defenders, journalists, and activists. Particularly worrying cases include the case of Robson Chere, Namatai Kwekweza, and Samuel Gwenzi, who in July 2024 were forcibly removed from a flight at Robert Mugabe International Airport by state security agents, arbitrarily detained, tortured, and subsequently released and charged with “disorderly conduct” for participating in a peaceful protest, reflecting the state's heavy-handed approach to silencing dissent. They were arrested together with Vusumuzi Sibanda—a sound engineer who seemed to have been mistakenly bundled together with the CSO leaders. As of 23 January 2025, the court proceedings against the CSO leaders were still ongoing. Actions like these by the state have fostered a climate of fear among those advocating for human rights and democracy. In addition to that, ahead of the Summit of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in August 2024, about 53 of ZimRights members were displaced as they went into hiding fearing for their lives as they were being accused of plotting to protest during the summit.”¹⁸

A report issued by *Human Rights Watch* in January 2025 notes that: “In 2024, Zimbabwean authorities acted to undermine democratic processes, repressed civil society and restricted political pluralism. They continued to weaponize the criminal justice system against perceived critics and the political opposition. Impunity for the ruling party ZANU-PF violence, intimidation, harassment, and repression against opposition members and civil society activists restricted civic and political space. The authorities failed to uphold the government's domestic and international human rights obligations to respect peaceful activism.”¹⁹

This report further points out that: “Section 73 of the 2006 Criminal Code of Zimbabwe criminalizes same-sex sexual activities between men. Sentences include a maximum penalty of one year and a fine. Article 78(3) of the Constitution prohibits same-sex marriage. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people frequently face threats, harassment and violence. In August 2024, two men

¹⁵ Lawyers for Lawyers (3 February 2025) Zimbabwe: Joint Submission to the United Nations Human Rights Committee (Legal profession; lawyers)

¹⁶ *ibid*

¹⁷ Zimbabwe Human Rights Association (ZimRights) (31 January 2025) Zimbabwe's Compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: Information on the National Human Rights Situation Relating to Civic Space

¹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch (16 January 2025) *World Report 2025: Zimbabwe*

were arrested and charged under sodomy laws while they were seeking justice for blackmail and extortion.”²⁰

This document further points out that: “Child labor remained a serious problem, with children participating in hazardous work in tobacco farming and other sectors. School fees continued to pose a barrier to education. Pregnant girls and adolescent mothers continued to face challenges continuing formal education.”²¹

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