

### PRESS STATEMENT ON REPORTED DEATHS IN ZIMBABWE PRISONS

05 December 2013

The Zimbabwe Association of Doctors for Human Rights (ZADHR) is gravely concerned with submissions presented before the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs by officials from the Ministry of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs and the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Services (ZPCS) officials on the 2nd of December 2013 concerning the death of more than 100 prisoners in Zimbabwe since January 2013. The report exposed that the deaths were as a result of nutrition-related illnesses induced by food shortages and natural causes. However, for certainty's sake, there has to be a second opinion on the actual cause of the deaths from independent medical personnel.

In that regard, ZADHR wishes to stress that the role of the state is the preservation of the dignity of its citizens without discrimination. Prisoners like all other citizens are entitled to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health as such; as ZADHR we remind the authorities that prisons should be treated as correctional facilities tasked with the reformation and rehabilitation of persons who are admitted into the prison system for correction and reformation and not death traps.

Zimbabwe's prison conditions are a travesty of national, regional and international standards. The United Nations' Standard Minimum Rules (SMR) for Treatment of Prisoners notes that prisons shall be well-ordered communities: where there is no danger to life, health or personal integrity. The Kampala Declaration on Prison Conditions in Africa (1996) and the Ouagadougou Declaration on Accelerating Prison and Penal Reform in Africa (2002) and the Kadoma Declaration on Community Service (1997) further reinforce that need.

More importantly, the new constitution of Zimbabwe provides protection for arrested, detained persons and sentenced prisoners under Section 50 where it is established that such persons now have the right to consult with a medical practitioner of their choice at their own expense, conditions of detention that are consistent with human dignity, including the opportunity for physical exercise and the provision at state expense, of adequate accommodation, ablution facilities, personal hygiene, nutrition, appropriate reading material and medical treatment. Thus, the shortage of food in our prisons is inimical to the realisation of the right to health for inmates as good nutrition is an essential aspect of health.

Over and above, it must be fully appreciated that prison health is a public health concern. Disease prevention and control in prisons is essential in controlling the outbreaks of diseases from prisons into the public domain and from the public domain into prisons. In light of the foregoing, ZADHR proffers the following recommendations:

1. The Prisons and Correctional Services of Zimbabwe must ensure that the prison health system is integrated into the public health system and establish linkages and synergies with the Ministry of Health and Child Care in an effort to stem disease outbreaks in prisons and curb preventable deaths.

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2. The central government must prioritize and increase budget allocations to prisons to ensure that the mandatory dietary regime of three meals a day to improve inmates' health conditions is maintained.
3. The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners must be upheld to ensure the health rights, registration, personal hygiene, clothing and bedding, food, exercise and sport, medical services, discipline and punishment, information to and complaints by prisoners, contact with the outside world, books, religion are upheld.
4. The ZPCS must create a system of notification of death, illness, transfer, removal of prisoners to the relatives of prisoners and allow such relatives to intervene in the best interests of the prisoners.

