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Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Seventy-eighth session

Summary record of the 44th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Wednesday, 17 September 2025, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Saran

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Consideration of reports (continued)

(a) Reports submitted by States Parties under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant (continued)

Second periodic report of Zimbabwe (E/C.12/ZWE/2; E/C.12/ZWE/Q/2; E/C.12/ZWE/RQ/2)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Zimbabwe joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Zimbabwe**, introducing his country's second periodic report (E/C.12/ZWE/2), said that Zimbabwe had made significant progress in meeting its obligations under the Covenant through substantive legislative reforms, administrative measures and commitment to the democratic process, which it viewed as key to realizing its national vision of an empowered and prosperous middle-income society by 2030.
3. The Government continued to uphold its constitutional and legislative obligations to advance equality, prevent discrimination and ensure the protection of all persons, including persons with disabilities. The Constitution and other laws and regulations guaranteed the right to decent work, equal remuneration for work of equal value, and safe, healthy and favourable working conditions for all. During the period under review, Zimbabwe had ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. The Labour Act had been amended to prohibit employment discrimination on the basis of disability, broaden the scope of collective bargaining and trade unionism and eliminate the qualifying period for maternity leave. The social security framework, which comprised both State-funded social assistance and contribution-based social insurance, was being extended with coverage for the informal sector to achieve universal social security protection. Zimbabwe remained committed to exercising due diligence and ensuring accountability among business entities operating within its jurisdiction, particularly in relation to the protection and promotion of human rights. Environmental and social impact assessments were prerequisites for the licensing of entities operating in the mining, agriculture and construction sectors.
4. The Government continued to tackle corruption by implementing legal reforms, including through the introduction of the bill on the protection of whistle-blowers and witnesses, and strengthening institutional and enforcement mechanisms. The bill on persons with disabilities, which would replace the Disabled Persons Act and achieve closer alignment with the Constitution and international treaties, had been passed and was awaiting presidential signature. To address gender stereotypes, a range of initiatives had been developed to improve women's representation in political and decision-making roles in both the public and private sectors through changes to law and policy, advocacy initiatives and grassroots movements to combat gender inequalities in all areas of Zimbabwean life. To ensure access to adequate food, education, water and sanitation, the Government was implementing various social protection programmes to cater for the most disadvantaged and marginalized groups. Under the Education Act, which provided that all citizens were entitled to receive free basic education, more than 1.5 million learners had received assistance with school and examination fees through the Basic Education Assistance Module.
5. Under a programme to guarantee the nation's food security and mitigate the effects of climate change, 340,000 smallholder farmers had each been provided with a booster kit for the irrigation of 5 hectares of land. The Agricultural and Rural Development Authority had been made responsible for growing the country's strategic grain reserve and was producing approximately 1.2 million metric tons of grain per year. Larger commercial farmers had been issued with secure land tenure documents for their farms to enable them to obtain access to finance. To improve access to potable water, the Government was drilling 35,000 boreholes in villages across the country and establishing business units in those villages to facilitate the growth and sale of a variety of crops with a view to improving nutrition. The establishment and improvement of Mothers' Waiting Homes at rural healthcare facilities had significantly increased the quality of maternal healthcare.

6. Although the use of unilateral coercive measures against the country continued to pose a major obstacle to the fulfilment of its obligations under the Covenant, Zimbabwe continued to invest heavily in human rights mechanisms and architecture and was making steady progress in strengthening the protection of economic, social and cultural rights.

7. **Mr. Abashidze** (Country Rapporteur) said that, given that the Constitution provided that all international agreements to which the State Party was a party must be incorporated into domestic law, he wished to know whether the State Party had a law incorporating the provisions of the Covenant into domestic law. If not, given that, in 2021, the Constitutional Court had not recognized the legal force of the right to housing set forth in the Covenant, he wondered to what extent the declaration of rights in chapter 4 of the Constitution covered the Covenant's provisions, and whether the Constitutional Court would accept a complaint from a citizen asserting that a certain right provided for in the Covenant was absent from the Constitution and should be recognized.

8. He would welcome statistics on the number of judges, lawyers and staff members of ministries and agencies in the economic and social sectors who had undergone training courses on promoting economic, social and cultural rights. He wished to know which ministries were responsible for conducting such training, whether representatives of the United Nations present in the State Party or the region were involved in it and whether the State Party had requested technical assistance from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on that matter. It would be helpful to hear whether the Constitution or the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission Act contained provisions mandating the Commission to protect and enforce economic, social and cultural rights. He wished to know whether, in the delegation's view, it would be more in line with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles) to entrust the parliament with matters concerning the formation, funding and accountability of the Commission, thereby removing them as far as possible from the oversight of the executive branch. He would appreciate statistics on the budget of the Commission and the funding it had received over the previous five years, as well as information on measures taken to strengthen its staffing capacity.

9. He wished to know what legislative, administrative and judicial steps had been taken to ensure that human rights defenders were protected from arbitrary actions and unlawful persecution; whether any preventive measures were being taken to avoid such violations; and what results had been achieved. It would be useful to know what measures the authorities were taking to address the root causes of corruption in areas such as the issuance of licences in different economic sectors; to combat bribery in public services; and to strengthen the status and functions of governmental and non-governmental oversight bodies and institutions in the fight against corruption and bribery. He would welcome up-to-date statistics on the number of public officials who had been held criminally accountable for such offences.

10. It would be useful to receive details of the legal framework and State policy in place for monitoring business activities to ensure respect for the economic, social and cultural rights of local populations. He wondered what mechanisms were in place to assist people in cases of displacement from their customary territories, forced evictions or environmental pollution, and to protect the right of Indigenous groups to free, prior and informed consent. He wondered what position the State Party took domestically and at international forums regarding climate change mitigation and the protection of sovereignty in the free use of national resources for national development. He wished to know what specific steps the State Party was taking domestically and at the international level to reduce its debt, the servicing of which consumed a substantial part of the State budget, and what action was being taken to improve tax policy to help reduce poverty.

11. It would be useful to know whether the State Party planned to expand its normative anti-discrimination framework to cover vulnerable categories of citizens, in particular persons living with HIV, with a view to facilitating their access to employment and social services. He wondered what action the State Party was taking to combat indirect and multiple forms of discrimination against persons with disabilities that were hindering their equal participation in economic and social life and their access to public services. He would appreciate information on the specific legislative, institutional and other measures taken by the Government to address substantive inequality between women and men and barriers to

women's economic and social empowerment, including the enduring gender pay and pension gaps, the disproportionate concentration of women in the informal economy and agriculture with limited support to enhance their incomes, and women's limited access to and ownership of land.

12. **A representative of Zimbabwe** said that any laws must be interpreted in a manner consistent with chapter 4 of the Constitution establishing fundamental human rights, which was comprehensive. There was no stand-alone law on economic, social and cultural rights; laws intended to implement the Covenant were instead developed to ensure complementarity with existing laws. Section 85 of the Constitution provided that any person acting in their own interests, on behalf of others or in the public interest, or any association acting in the interests of its members, could approach a court with claims that a fundamental right or freedom enshrined in chapter 4 of the Constitution had been, was being or was likely to be infringed.

13. In addition to investigating high-profile corruption cases, the Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission had provided anti-corruption training to local authorities and companies around the country and asked them to sign integrity pledges in which they committed to taking certain steps to curb corruption. Electronic systems had been introduced to improve accountability and reduce the risk of corruption in the management of traffic, passports and court documents.

14. Under Zimbabwean law, companies wishing to obtain approval to conduct operations in the country must first consult with the local authorities and local communities and reach an agreement with them on appropriate compensation for any relocation required, and an environmental impact assessment must also be carried out. Local communities who had not been properly consulted could initiate legal proceedings and had done so previously.

15. **A representative of Zimbabwe** said that, following the country's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2013, the Disabled Persons Act had been repealed and the bill on the rights of persons with disabilities had been submitted to achieve greater alignment with the Covenant and the Constitution by placing a greater emphasis on the human rights of persons with disabilities. The bill, which contained improved wording, would broaden the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities and ensure that there was no discrimination against persons with disabilities at home, in the workplace or in a number of other public spaces.

16. **A representative of Zimbabwe** said that one of the country's judges was a person with a disability, and the President of Zimbabwe had an adviser on disability matters who was himself a person with a disability. A law criminalizing the "wilful transmission" of HIV had been repealed on the grounds that it stigmatized persons living with the virus, and action had been taken to combat employment discrimination against such persons. In any case, the World Health Organization (WHO) no longer considered HIV/AIDS to be an untreatable fatal condition, and the State had therefore readjusted its priorities to focus on other diseases such as cancer and diabetes.

17. A 30 per cent quota of seats in the National Assembly and on local councils was reserved for women while the Senate operated on a system whereby membership was equally divided between men and women. According to the Constitution, moreover, if the head of a civil service department was a man, the deputy must be a woman, and vice versa. Judges were trained to interpret the law in accordance with chapter IV of the Constitution, which envisaged the obligation to take account of international law and the treaties to which Zimbabwe was a party, including the Covenant. In partnership with the International Commission of Jurists, a training curriculum on fair trial guarantees and human rights had been developed for senior prosecutors.

18. The State was seeking to boost foreign investment as a motor for national development. Nonetheless, foreign investors were closely monitored by the Zimbabwe Investment and Development Agency to ensure that their activities complied with national laws regulating labour and the environment. In particular, the Agency required investors to demonstrate that they had received clearance from the local authorities in the areas in which they intended to operate. Investors, moreover, were obliged to show a degree of corporate social responsibility by investing some of their returns back into those areas. The country

faced myriad challenges, in particular due to sanctions which restricted the inflow of fresh capital. Nonetheless, the Government was committed to servicing the national debt as the only way to eventually extinguish that debt. At the same time, it remained mindful that repayment should not cause it to overlook the importance of economic and social rights, and it was currently engaged in discussions to restructure the debt.

19. The economy of Zimbabwe was divided into two, with a formal sector, which was perhaps slightly overtaxed, and a large informal sector, which was often not taxed at all. The State, therefore, was focusing its energies on formalizing the informal economy with a view to equalizing the tax regime and reducing taxes overall. It was also seeking to eliminate instances of duplicate taxation in which central government and local authorities charged the same levies, for example road tax. The Government hoped that, by thus harmonizing and streamlining the fiscal system across all sectors, it would create more favourable business conditions.

20. **Mr. Fiorio Vaesken** said that he wished to hear more about the mandate, functions and membership of the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission and about the legal framework within which it operated. It would also be interesting to learn what role the Commission played in monitoring and implementing recommendations received from human rights treaty bodies and whether it was involved in the drafting of reports submitted to those bodies.

21. **Ms. Chen** said that she was concerned by the fact – reported by the State Party in its replies to the list of issues ([E/C.12/ZWE/RQ/2](#)) – that, as a consequence of climate change, the number of persons living in poverty had doubled in less than 10 years. She wished to know how the Government had acted to remedy that state of affairs and whether the situation had improved with the end of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. She commended the State for having created the Junior Parliament and wished to know what role that body played in the promotion of economic, social and cultural rights.

22. **Mr. Palmisano** (Country Task Force) said that the delegation should provide concrete examples of resource-exploitation or industrial projects carried out by large foreign or multinational companies that had been stopped because they were being conducted without the free, prior and informed consent of local communities. It would also be interesting to know if any public officials or politicians had been convicted of corruption in relation to the approval of such projects.

23. **Mr. Windfuhr** said that he wondered whether, in the face of climate change and debt repayment commitments, the Government was able to maintain its obligation under the Maputo Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security in Africa to allocate 10 per cent of its budget to the agriculture sector. He also wished to know if the State received enough climate- and development-related support from the international community to enable it to invest adequately in rural areas, where the majority of poverty was concentrated.

24. **A representative of Zimbabwe** said that the mandate and functions of the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission were set forth in detail in section 243 of the Constitution. One particularly significant aspect of the Commission's work lay in its independent and objective contributions to the reports submitted to human rights treaty bodies. Under the Presidential Input Support Programme, needy smallholders were provided with sufficient seed and fertilizer to grow enough grain for their household for a year. One measure of the increase in rural poverty lay in the fact that, while just 350,000 families had availed themselves of the Support Programme in 2015, that number had risen to 1.3 million by 2024. In the light of that situation, the State had taken further action to mitigate the impact of climate change by drilling boreholes and, more generally, by seeking to move from rain-fed to irrigation-based agriculture. Beneficiaries of the system, having harvested their grain, were required to contribute 10 kg of their yield to the strategic grain reserve of the State, which currently stood at nearly 90,000 metric tons. On a separate front, the State was also pursuing urban renewal in order to create infrastructure capable of withstanding climate change, to which end it had created a stand-alone Ministry of Housing.

25. In the period under review, 11,600 applications for environmental impact assessment certificates had been submitted by companies involved in resource extraction and exploitation, and 10,450 certificates had been issued. There had been instances where

companies had breached the law and, as a consequence, been ordered to halt their activities. He was not aware of any convictions or prison sentences handed down in that regard because such matters were covered by civil and not criminal law; however, certain companies had been required to pay fines. Environmental rights were enshrined in section 73 of the Constitution, and people living in areas affected by resource-extraction operations received training to inform them about their rights and about how to seek compensation and redress.

26. The Government invested heavily in rural areas, well beyond the 10 per cent envisaged in the Maputo Declaration. Its aim in so doing was not only to increase productivity and make agriculture more resilient to climate change, but also to provide social assistance to small-scale farmers in those areas and to reinforce the legal certainty of their land tenure. Some farmers had been allowed to buy the land they occupied, thereby enabling them to use the title deed as security for future loans.

27. **Mr. Bouzid** (Country Task Force) said that he wished to congratulate the State Party for having adopted the Labour Code and established the labour courts.

28. The delegation might comment on reports that the right to work had been undermined by a declining economy, inadequate enforcement of labour laws and the suppression of trade union activity, and that, despite the introduction of the National Employment Policy Framework, unemployment remained alarmingly high, forcing millions of people into the informal sector. It might also furnish statistics on the number of informal workers who had moved into formal employment since 2021. He wished to know what the Government intended to do to ensure that the minimum wage was sufficient for a decent standard of living and how it would address allegations that vendors and informal traders had been mistreated by municipal authorities. He wondered what steps would be taken to introduce a legal requirement for entities to exercise human rights due diligence.

29. He would like to know whether the Government intended to extend the minimum wage to cover domestic and agricultural workers. He would welcome the delegation's response to reports that the authorities had acted harshly to silence dissent among civil servants, including teachers and healthcare workers, whose salaries had not been increased in line with inflation. He wished to know how the Government planned to improve enforcement of occupational health and safety measures, particularly in the mining and construction sectors, and to ensure that the working week did not exceed 40 hours. He was curious to know how many labour inspectors had been employed as of June 2025 and how many labour inspections had been conducted on tobacco farms since 2018. He would like to receive details of the measures that had been taken to ensure that companies engaged in diamond mining respected human rights, including labour rights, in their operations and business relationships, including global value chains.

30. He wished to know how the State Party protected trade union leaders and members from harassment, kidnapping and enforced disappearance and how it was addressing forced labour, servitude and child labour in the mining sector. Given that the definition of "essential services" was left to the discretion of the Minister for Public Service, Labour and Social Development, he wished to know whether workers or trade unions had a legal right to bring a challenge before the courts if the Minister decided to prevent certain categories of workers from taking collective industrial action. The delegation might describe the measures being taken to enhance the enforcement of labour legislation to ensure favourable conditions for workers, including the prevention of exposure to toxic chemicals in the mining and agricultural sectors and of labour exploitation, unpaid wages and precarious employment contracts.

31. He would like to know why the disbursements made to social security schemes had often been lower than the planned budget allocation, what was being done to ensure that social security systems made adequate provision for part-time, self-employed and home-based workers and what steps were being taken to guarantee that those systems covered persons working in the informal sector. He would also like to know how the Government planned to address the erosion of pension funds, which had reportedly forced many retirees into extreme poverty. He wondered whether the Government provided access to methods to prevent and treat HIV/AIDS and malaria.

32. **A representative of Zimbabwe** said that statistics produced by the World Bank showed that his country's economy was growing. A road map was being drawn up to facilitate the transition of workers from the informal to the formal sector, which would generate higher tax revenues. People generally worked in the informal sector to avoid the formal checks that had been put in place to ensure that international sanctions were not breached. It was possible that the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act of 2001 that was in force in the United States of America might soon be repealed, enabling Zimbabweans to operate on an equal basis with citizens of other countries.

33. All trade union activity was permitted provided that it complied with the relevant legislation. At one time, certain political parties had used trade unions to further their own interests but that problem had been overcome. The Tripartite Negotiation Forum had been established, and the Government now provided labour leaders with the support they required, including vehicles, to promote labour laws. The definition of "essential services" was set out in the relevant statutes. Workers who performed life-saving duties and who were prohibited from engaging in full strike action could seek recourse by other means.

34. In a sometimes polarized political environment, there had been occasions when protests by civil servants had been hijacked to serve a particular political agenda. There had otherwise been constructive engagement with teachers and healthcare workers through the Tripartite Negotiation Forum.

35. A bill aimed at improving occupational health and safety had been submitted to parliament. Once the new legislation was in place, the number of labour inspectors would be increased and their powers expanded. There was no child labour in the formal mining and agricultural sectors in Zimbabwe. Persons who engaged in artisanal mining were often accompanied by their children when they went out to work.

36. There were plans to widen the national health insurance scheme to provide coverage for workers in the informal sector. Through the National Social Security Authority, workers were able to make extra contributions in addition to their own pension contributions. The Government intended to overhaul the State pension scheme and establish a pension fund with ring-fenced contributions that would guarantee a minimum pension. The disbursement of funds for social security schemes was dependent on the revenue that had been collected through taxation.

37. Inflation was not particularly high in Zimbabwe. The Tripartite Negotiation Forum was working on updating the minimum wage, which had already been extended to the agricultural sector.

38. Street vendors were required to undertake their activities in designated locations. There had been instances in which municipal police officers had been excessive in their efforts to request vendors operating in unauthorized areas to relocate.

39. Antiretroviral therapy for HIV/AIDS was provided free of charge. In areas where malaria was endemic, chemicals were sprayed to kill mosquitoes and antimalarial medicine was distributed.

40. **Mr. Bouzid** said that he wished to know whether any trade union federations other than the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions had been set up in the State Party and whether the State Party received any international assistance to facilitate the effective realization of the right to social security.

41. **Mr. Hennebel** said that he was curious to know whether the State Party had conducted an in-depth assessment of the impact that the international sanctions imposed on it had had on the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights. While he understood that child labour was formally prohibited in the mining sector, he considered it unlikely that such a ban would be fully adhered to in practice, and he would thus be interested to learn whether the State Party had received any complaints relating to the involvement of children in mining and had established mechanisms to hold to account the parties responsible and provide redress to any victims.

42. **Mr. Fiorio Vaesken** asked whether the State Party made a distinction between child labour and adolescent labour and, if so, whether adolescent labour was governed by specific regulations that were aligned with international human rights standards.

43. **A representative of Zimbabwe** said that the Zimbabwe Federation of Trade Unions was one of a small number of trade union federations that had been set up as alternatives to the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions.

44. International assistance had been received from a wide range of development partners, including the World Food Programme, the United States Agency for International Development, the Japan International Cooperation Agency and the Danish International Development Agency. There was a clear need to conduct studies on international sanctions in order to raise awareness of the effects of such measures.

45. A clear definition of child labour that excluded certain household chores and training activities was set out in national law. The activities of companies in the mining sector were monitored to ensure that they were compliant with the relevant laws and regulations, which addressed aspects such as the number of people working in the mines, their working hours, the nature of the work and the safety measures to be put in place. Steps were now being taken to ensure that the artisanal mining sector was subject to the same regulations, with a view to reducing the number of accidents and strengthening the monitoring of artisanal mining activities. Land affected by mining activities was restored to ensure that it could be safely used in the future.

46. **Mr. Nonthasoot** (Country Task Force) said that, in view of reports that children as young as 8 years old continued to work on plantations and that a third of girls were married before reaching adulthood, he would like to know what the State Party was doing to ensure that sufficient resources were allocated for the implementation of the laws addressing those issues.

47. He would welcome the delegation's comments on reports that almost half the population continued to lack access to nutritious food despite the introduction of various programmes to address food insecurity. The delegation might also respond to claims that housing conditions remained poor in rural, remote and deprived urban areas and that around 60,000 individuals had been forcibly evicted from their homes between 2017 and 2022. He wondered what steps would be taken to improve access to safe drinking water and sanitation and whether the national policies on water and sanitation set out binding measures and had their own budget lines.

48. The Committee had been informed that the climate change adaptation measures implemented by the State Party were insufficient to address the worsening impact of climate change on the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights. Accordingly, he wished to know whether the State Party planned to review and strengthen those measures and ensure that they were implemented in a manner that took into account the population's cultural heritage. It would be helpful to learn what short- and long-term measures would be introduced to address the persistently high rates of poverty and extreme poverty, which had recently been affected by the high level of inflation, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the recurrent drought. Information on any plans to develop a policy for the industrialization of the economy would be welcome.

49. He would appreciate the delegation's comments on the serious challenges affecting the healthcare system, which included a lack of funding, heavy reliance on financing from donors and the emigration of medical professionals. He wished to know whether the bill on the establishment of the National Drug and Substance Control Agency set out harm reduction measures that would enable drug users and individuals living with HIV/AIDS to obtain appropriate treatment and ensure that drug users could do so without fear of criminal prosecution. It would be useful to learn what would be done to revitalize the National AIDS Trust Fund, the resources of which were depleting owing to a decline in international support, and the programmes that it financed. The delegation might comment on the challenges hampering access to sexual and reproductive healthcare for women and girls in rural and disadvantaged urban areas and explain whether Indigenous Peoples and persons with disabilities enjoyed equal access to safe abortion services.

50. **A representative of Zimbabwe** said that many plantations were run by established companies and monitored by inspectors from the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Development and the Occupational Safety and Health Advisory Council, which meant that the use of child labourers on those sites was inconceivable. The country's progress in the area of agriculture had been recognized by the World Bank Group. An emphasis on the production of winter crops had helped mitigate the effects of the recent drought, which had been one of the worst ever experienced. The Government had provided some 1.3 million households with the inputs they required to grow their own food. The statistics indicated that Zimbabwe now enjoyed food security; it was among the largest producers of wheat in Africa and had recently seen record levels of maize production. With regard to climate adaptation, steps were being taken to develop programmes that would reduce the impact of droughts by guaranteeing a sufficient supply of food.

51. The Government had run a resettlement programme in order to guarantee the orderly and productive use of land. Under that programme, any unauthorized settlers had been evicted from the land they occupied and offered a plot of land elsewhere. The Government recognized that there was a shortage of housing in urban areas and was working to establish a standardized model for housing units in rural areas in order to ensure that any houses built could withstand the effects of climate change. Zimbabwe was not prone to waterborne diseases. The country had been declared free of cholera after an outbreak of the disease in 2023 and 2024 had been halted.

52. Statistics showed that inflation had been contained and that economic growth had generally been strong in recent years. While the COVID-19 pandemic had had an impact on the entire population, funding had successfully been mobilized in order to ensure that individuals received the medication and vaccinations they needed.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.