

A Deadly shade of Green: The threat to Environmental Human Rights Defenders in Zimbabwe

Unless the international community strengthens its support for, and improves its protection of environmental human rights defenders, the full enjoyment of human rights and the realisation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals will be impossible...” John H. Knox, Special Rapporteur on the human rights and the environment

While many aspects of the relationship between human rights and the environment are important, none is more urgent than the need to protect those individuals who work, often at great personal risk, to protect their natural environment from unsustainable exploitation, and defend the human rights of themselves and their communities. Without these dedicated individuals, the protection of the environment and of the rights that depend upon it would be impossible.

The last few years has seen an increase in community surveillance and moni-



toring on environmental protection in Zimbabwe, the region and globally, and so has the threats facing Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) become perilous and cumulative.

Less than three years ago, Global Witness conducted the first comprehensive review of the number of killings of EHRDs around the world. Going back to the beginning of 2002, and covering cases through to the end of 2013, it found that at least 908 people had been killed as a result of protecting their rights to land and the environment. More than 90% of recorded deaths

occurred in only nine countries. Moreover, the crisis appears to be rapidly growing. Global Witness reported that ‘three times as many people were killed in 2012 than 10 years previously, with the death rate rising in the past four years to an average of two activists a week.’

Shocking as these numbers may be, they are, in themselves, an inadequate means of conveying the scale and nature of the challenges and risks faced by EHRDs. For one thing, data on the number of killings tells us nothing about the myriad of other human rights

violations suffered by EHRDs. Killings may be ‘the most acute and measurable end of a range of threats’ to EHRDs, but for every EHRD murdered, many more, in every region of the world, are subjected to other types of violence or harassment, designed to instill fear and prevent activism.

Back home, in Zimbabwe the interconnectedness of environmental activism and; politicization of environment and natural resources puts EHRDs at greater risk. The threat against EHRDs is worsening in part because ‘competition for access to natural resources is intensifying against a backdrop of extreme inequality,’ while ‘more and more ordinary people are finding themselves on the frontline of the battle to defend their environment from corporate or state abuse, and from unsustainable exploitation.’ The proliferation of unsustainable Chinese investments lurking behind the protection of the political elite has not gone unnoticed, particularly in mining communities. Communities in areas like Penhalonga, Hwange and Mutoko

have raised their voice against water pollution, land degradation, wildlife loss and deforestation from mining and large farming investments. This has attracted attention from the political elite who continue to harass EHRDs in local communities often labelling them “enemies of progress”, opposition party members or puppets of the West. In most cases EHRDs are deprived of equal opportunities to access land, humanitarian aid or basic services for speaking out against gross environmental violations.

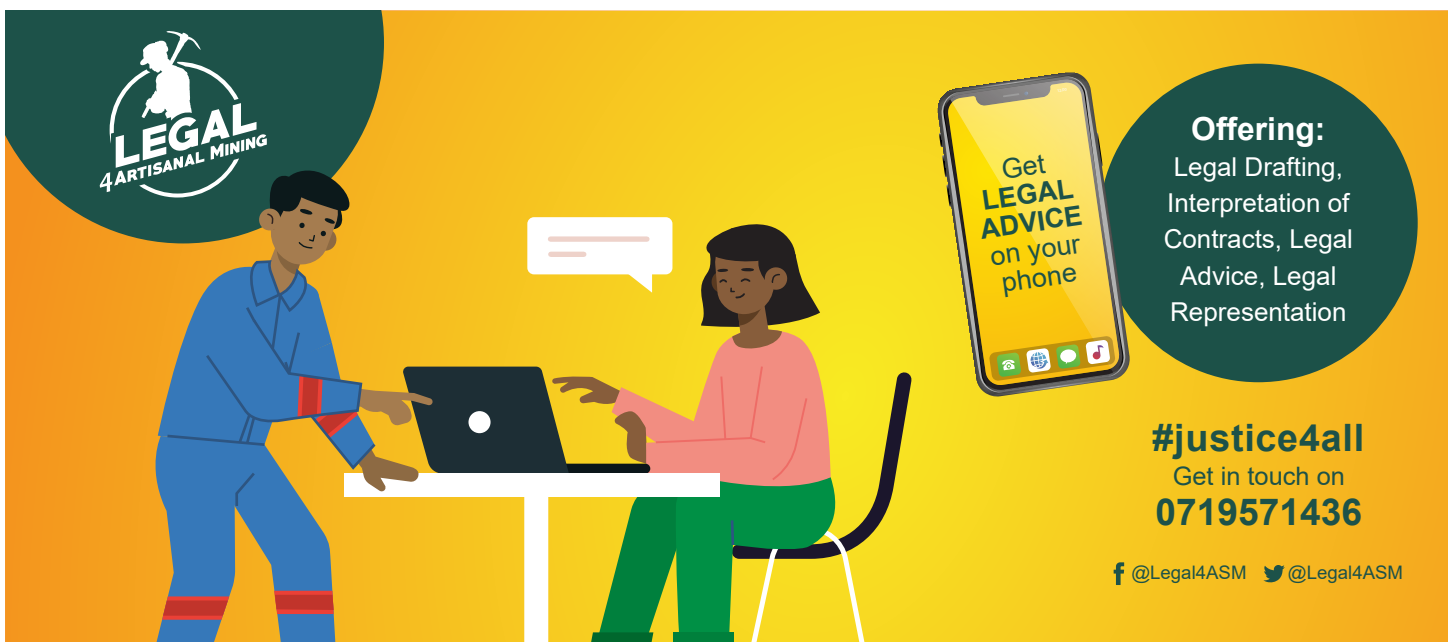
Most importantly, behind the above-mentioned statistics, behind each of those numbers, is a face – a person targeted merely for trying to assert their rights and protect their environment, and a person whose loss continues to be felt by their family, their community and their cause.

Therefore Green Governance Zimbabwe Trust and its partners is pursuing an agenda which seeks to;

- Understand the contemporary situation of EHRDs around the

country

- Understand why human rights violations against EHRDs appear to be on the increase in all parts of the country and the region
- Explain why the work of EHRDs is so vital – for the planet, for local communities, including indigenous communities, and for sustainable development.
- Present some of the inspiring stories of EHRDs who have sought to assert their human rights to defend the environment, including those who have paid the ultimate price for their bravery and dedication.
- Assess current international efforts, led by the United Nations, to support EHRDs and their work.
- Present recommendations, to all stakeholders, as to how the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission, its mechanisms, and the wider international community can better protect and promote the rights of EHRDs, and ‘defend the defenders’ so that they can continue their vital work.



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Political party financing: Natural resources a key enabler

Political party financing remains a cog in the democratisation of elections because of its potential to place other parties ahead in the electioneering process at the expense of others. During instances where the sources of funding for elections are often opaque, parties source illicit funds from foreign invest (through arranged investment), from individuals and from local corporates who are seeking to have their businesses “protected” by the incumbent ruling party that may otherwise disrupt them for non-conformity. These practices all violate the political party finances act and poses a threat to democracy and allegiance that elected officials should ideally have towards the electorate.

The official sources of financing for political parties in Zimbabwe are laid out in the political parties finances act (Political Parties (Finance) Act (Chapter 2:11), where parties are supposed to fulfil the requirement of 5% of the total number of votes cast in the recent election to get financial support from the state; which says;

“Each political party whose candidates received at least five per centum of the total number of votes cast in the most recent general election shall be entitled to the same proportion of the total moneys appropriated as the total

number of votes cast for its candidates in the election bears to the total number of votes cast for all its candidates in that election.”

However, this funding is not adequate. To supplement this paltry amount, parties find themselves siphoning money from the state, business or individuals in order to gear up and defend or protect their vote and secure control of the government. The huge financial gap that is created by parties during elections therefore makes “money” a crucial commodity that has a bearing on a party’s potential to mobilise voters, engage communities and convince voters for the purposes of securing a seat in parliament. For the party which is in control of government, fundraising for elections is characterised by abuse of state resources such as schools, government institutions and the electorate to generate financial resources which are channeled towards local and national level electioneering purposes.

As we look forward to the 2023 elections, it is without doubt that the mining sector has again been earmarked to finance the election cycles as evidenced by the events of the last two years. The mining sector in its various forms of – large scale, small-scale and artisanal mining has largely been infiltrated by the ruling party stalwarts who have serious control over the production, administration and trade of the precious mineral. While this is being done with prejudice, lawlessness and impunity; it will attract the responsibility to fund the election process of the ruling party in order to get protection, reprieve and waivers. The nature in which funds are

generated within the artisanal mining sector is even more worrisome because production, administration and trade can happen without any trace or track-record. It is therefore possible for artisanal miners to produce gold or diamond output, trade it and finance the incumbent party during election for them to get the much needed protection to continue their illicit trade without any paper trail or evidence of corruption.

This state of affairs distorts the ability for elections to be conducted in a level playing as the incumbent party has all the resources and more to finance its election campaign. The Centre for Natural Resource Governance in the report *Mortgaging the Future in Return for Power – Zimbabwe’s Natural Resources and the 2018 Election* makes reference to the country’s mineral resources being mortgaged and used as surety for the illicit ‘loans’ that politicians and political parties receive from corporate entities and individuals to fund their election campaigns. The report provides a case in point where Bokai mine, which Zanu-PF, through the ZMDC, sold for \$100 000 000-00 to Rautenbach who immediately passed the same mine to CAMEC for a total \$175 000 000-00. CAMEC, in turn, after just a month of its purchase of the mine, valued the same for US\$1 billion, an increase of US\$825 000 000-00 in a space of 30 days.

Citizen urgency to monitor the abuse of natural resources in electioneering is called for in order to curb vote buying, clientelism and neo-patrimonialism associated with elections in Zimbabwe. It is key for citizens to be urged to desist from being used to

facilitate the consolidation of power of political parties but to play a watch-dog role where resources channeled towards their intended purpose of developing and building community resilience.

Condolence Message



Dewa Mavhinga

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Press Statement on the 16 Days of Activism against gender based violence

#orangetheworld #generationequality #16days

As we join the world to commemorate the Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, under 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence (GBV) we are reminded of a growing scourge. COVID 19 induced lockdowns have not only extended inequalities, they inadvertently placed vulnerable women under domestic conditions which festers violent reprisals with intimate partners.

These days offers an opportunity to take stock as a nation, organizations civic players and various stakeholders of our efforts to eliminate violence against women. Traditional and religious leaders have a lot of work towards the elimination of violence against women and girls. Elimination of violence against women and girls is a target under the Sustainable Development Goal 5 which enjoins for the achievement of gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Results of violence against women in rural communities include Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), miscarriages, stillbirth, low birth weight, anxiety and depression and trans-generational recapitulation of violence, justification of wife beating, and women’s economic disadvantage, all of which are manifest in our communities. Furthermore, intimate partner violence is endemic and culturally sanctioned household maltreatment are prevalent scourges that needs to be addressed at both individual and institutional levels. Women living in communities affected by Climate Change disasters, like Chimanimani, are not only faced with increased livelihood burdens but also bear the scars of GBV.

Our recommendations is for concerted and increased efforts for gender mainstreaming across government ministries, departments, institutions and structures of governance to ensure the elimination of violence against women across all sectors. Government must set aside funds for social protection schemes to facilitate for robust economic, social and human development as well as the rehabilitation of GBV survivors. This should ideally include the setting up of safe spaces for rehabilitation of victims and provide a platform for recovery. Empowerment of women through ensuring that they equally have access to economic opportunities such as land, loans and trade; and are also able to compete in authority of power is key.