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17 June 2022

## **Open letter to the public**

As the government health workers of Zimbabwe, it is with regret that we inform the general public that we have taken a decision to withdraw our labor effective **Monday, 20 June 2022**. It is not a decision that was taken lightly, we are fully cognisant of the human costs related to any action of this kind but the conditions of service, specifically the remuneration of healthcare workers is presently so poor that most health workers can no longer afford the service they provide and nor are they able to look after and fend for their families. It is common knowledge that the economic conditions prevailing in the country have rapidly deteriorated especially over the last three months. This is something that the government has acknowledged and is reflected by the governments continued review of tariffs and expenses. State related enterprises have also reviewed their tariffs on a continued basis. Recent examples include the increases in electricity and fuel prices, toll fees and vehicle licensing fees to mention a few. Even the government itself has reviewed and increased the prices of hospital services, rating them against the interbank rate. There can be no greater acknowledgment by the health authorities regarding the loss of value than this. Inflation has skyrocketed and is now greater than 130%, year on year. The property datum line for a small family of six now sits at \$133,000 ZWL. Even the highest earning healthcare workers now earn far less than this.

The decision to withdraw service has only come after repeated efforts to engage the employer, the Health Service Board and the Ministry of Health and Childcare, pleading with them to review the conditions of service of health workers. To date, we have written more than five letters over the last 14 months requesting meetings, to engage on how

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to improve the conditions of service and improve the moral of the healthcare workers. Yet to date, we've not had a single meeting with the Health Service Board in 14 months. Other civil servants have enjoyed the company of their minister but this is not the case with the health workers. As workers, there has not been a single meeting with the Minister of Health and Child care since his appointment. The Health Service Board chairperson has also been hostile to health workers and has repeatedly refused our calls to engage with him. Not only that, the government continues to spread lies and misinformation about the current conditions of service for the healthcare workers. The minister of finance, publicly refers to free meals, free transport and free accommodation, all of which is not subsisting on the ground. The government prefers to award unilaterally, token increases which do not meaningfully improve the conditions of service. They prefer to misinform the public, quoting percentage increases without specifying the actual value of the increases. The last of which was a token 20% increase awarded in February 2022.



The prevailing poor conditions of service have caused significant brain drain within the health sector, with more than 4000 resignations in the last three years. Instead of engaging with the workers, the health authorities through the Ministry of Health have drafted and released a barrage of draconian measures designed to stem the outflow of health workers. They have illegally prevented the issuance of Certificates of Good standing for doctors which are needed for doctors seeking employment or further training abroad. They have also centralized and withheld the provision of Letters of Verification for Nurses. They drafted the recently rejected Health services amendment act without consulting health workers. This proposed amendment had a single objective of removing the workers rights to express their frustrations to industrial action. We applaud Parliament for rejecting this draft amendment as it clearly does not address the root cause of the health crisis which known to all. All of this has led to extremely low morale among the healthcare workers. We can go as far as to say that it's an undesirable situation to be cared for by an unhappy health worker.

The current impasse could easily be avoided, if the employer, the health service board decided to engage the health workers

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meaningfully. It is our prayer that this withdrawal of service is brief, in order to limit the unnecessary inconvenience to the public who depend on our healthcare services.

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Zimbabwe Health APEX Council