**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN: HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS OF PEOPLE WHO USE ANDS INJECT DRUGS IN ZIMBABWE**

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**Background**

This is a submission to the UN Human Rights Council on human rights challenges.

in addressing and countering all aspects of the world drug problem. I am writing from Zimbabwe with challenges in addressing the same.

Zimbabwean laws criminalize people who use and inject drugs in their diversity. The Dangerous Drugs Act and the Criminal Code Ch.9: 23 s157 makes it a criminal offence to use substances even in small quantities for personal use. These pieces of legislation have made it difficult for people who use and inject drugs to seek services for our drug use.

In 2020, civil society and government came together to put in place a Zimbabwe National drug Master Plan to enable people who use and inject drugs to get harm reduction services. On the 14th of September 2021, the government adopted the master plan and at the same time, an interministerial committee was put in place to ensure that the master plan is implemented.

To date, the master plan has not been fully implemented and a token fund of ZWL RTGS500 000 000 has been extended to the interministerial committee by the government. We are still to see any action regarding how that money is going to be used in the treatment of people who use and inject drugs. After putting a concerted effort to ensure people who use and inject drugs are served, the government has made a sudden turn much to the chagrin of the drug using community.

1. **Criminalization unabated**

The following websites have made clear the intention of the Zimbabwe government in denying people who use and inject drugs their human rights**.**

[**https://www.newsday.co.zw/theindependent/local-news/article/200006999/govt-declares-war-on-drug-abusers**](https://www.newsday.co.zw/theindependent/local-news/article/200006999/govt-declares-war-on-drug-abusers)**. Accessed 15052310:53hrs.**

<https://www.africa-press.net/zimbabwe/all-news/drug-abusers-to-be-treated-as-criminals-not-victims-muguti>

<https://www.herald.co.zw/crackdown-against-drugs-and-substances-abuse-nets-10-suspects/>

<https://dailynews.co.zw/police-and-harare-province-launch-crackdown-on-drugs/>

<https://www.herald.co.zw/heavy-penalties-for-drug-abuse-on-the-cards/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9xrOw9C12s>

Whilst the world is moving away from the criminalization mantra, it appears the authorities in Zimbabwe are bend on more criminalization as shown by the above links.

1. **Lack of Treatment services for people who use and inject drugs.**

Zimbabwe is a signatory to international statutes on health. Her constitution also talks on the provision of health for all. Since the drug scourge hit Zimbabwe, the government has refused to view the issue of drugs as a public health issue but has rather continuously criminalized people who use drugs. This criminalization has led to most drug users shunning health services. In health settings, there is lack of professionalism among health staff, and this has led to stigma and discrimination. People who use and inject drugs are not mental health patients but in ZIMBABWE, rights to proper harm reduction services and rehabilitation have been made to be a preserve of the wealth. We wan this scenario reversed all together. Zimbabwe should be accountable to her people who are on drugs.

1. **Lack of opportunities**

According to the Zimbabwe Situational Analysis Research (2022)[[1]](#footnote-1) lack of opportunities for the youths have driven most of them to partake to drugs. It is every citizen right to get employed or to be assisted to be self-sufficient. Zimbabwe is endowed with a lot of mineral resources and rich agricultural land which can be made accessible to the youthful populations so that they stay away from drugs. The government of Zimbabwe is therefore encouraged to reform the Criminal codification Act Ch. 9:23 s157 so that it does not criminalize drug use. Once a person is criminalized, one becomes profiled, and it becomes difficult to get employed.

1. **Lack of harm reduction services**

Zimbabwe does not offer harm reduction or any specialized services for the treatment of people who use and inject drugs. The lack of these services has made Zimbabwe lose a generation due to substance use**.** With a prevalent use of crystal use never witnessed before and an underground drug injecting market threatening the lives of young man and women, Zimbabwe is at a cross- roads.

**Way forward,**

As a community, we are rallying on the Zimbabwean government to view the issue of substance use as a public health issue and not a criminal issue. Criminalization is not a panacea to substance use as more new psycho active substances are now awash in Zimbabwe. It is estimated that 60% of mental health admissions in Zimbabwean mental homes are due to substance use. We call upon the human rights council to ensure that tailored made services, drug policy reform and the availability of harm reduction are topmost in the Zimbabwean government priorities in dealing assisting people who use and inject drugs. Police harassment should also be addressed if the world is to nip the challenges of drug use.

Yours Sincerely

Wilson Box

**Projects Executive Director**

**Zimbabwe Civil Liberties and Drug Network, on behalf of communities of people who use and inject drugs in Zimbabwe.**

1. https://idpc.net/publications/2022/12/zimbabwe-situational-analysis-of-drug-use-in-five-provinces-to-inform-hiv-and-tb-programming-for [↑](#footnote-ref-1)