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**ZIMBABWE CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE (ZCBC)**

**5 July 2023**

**A Pastoral Statement as we Prepare for the Elections on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of  
August 2023**

**“Take Courage, Stand up! Jesus is calling you.” Mark 10:49**

1. On the eve of our harmonized elections as your shepherds we would like to address our fellow brothers and sisters in the Church, and indeed all citizens of our beloved country Zimbabwe. The harmonized elections we are about to partake in are a landmark in the history of our journey as a nation. They speak of our growth as a democratic nation. They are an expression of a free, self-determining people who periodically partake in a shared exercise of choosing our leaders.

2. As we prepare for the elections we, your shepherds, would like to make a strong appeal to the nation. Critical, defining and determining as these elections are, the contest for the highest office in the land, and other offices, should not divide us as a nation. We are one people, imbued with inalienable rights derived from who we are: men, women, young people and children created in the image and likeness of God. Thus, as human beings we enjoy a certain human dignity that flows from our shared origins and destiny; we come from God and we return to God.

3. Given the nature of the human person it follows therefore that our dignity ought to be cherished, protected and upheld. The same rights and responsibilities drawn from God our Maker are enshrined in the Constitution of the land. It is in the interest of the human person and, in particular, the citizens of our land that we raise our voices as we address the various stakeholders calling them to “Take courage! Stand up ...” and be responsible in this time of campaigning that will culminate in elections.

4. To the citizens in the land, we encourage all the registered voters to: “Take courage! Stand up...” Let your voices be heard through the ballot. It is your right and duty as citizens that you vote. In so doing you determine the nation that you want, you choose its leaders for the next five years. Your vote is your personal decision and an expression of your freedom. Do not be intimidated, coerced or manipulated to vote against your will. Refuse to be used in violent attacks against your fellow brothers and sisters. Any party or politician that incites violence or persuades you to join in violent attacks, is not worthy of your vote. Give your vote to those who deserve it. Of the many choices that you are presented with, be discerning with the

aid of the Holy Spirit and choose who you want. This election is not about friends and enemies. If it presents us with choices, it is because of the varying ideologies that political parties uphold, not that we are sworn enemies. We are one people, Zimbabweans, divided we fall, but united we stand. United we must stand and be fellow workers in building up our country.

5. To the politicians, to you we make a strong appeal, in your campaigns: "Take courage! Stand up..." distinguish yourselves as noble men and women worthy of people's votes. You have a huge responsibility for the lives of our people. In these weeks you have spaces and the power to influence the citizens. Exercise this privilege responsibly. "To whom much has been given, much will be demanded." (Luke 12: 48). History will judge you harshly, should the nation be divided because of you. After all the campaigns and elections have come and gone, there remains not just party people to be governed, but the whole nation. If you divide the citizens now, it will be difficult to govern a divided nation. As you go about your campaigns persuade the citizens to vote for you, convince them of your ideas and aim for willing support.

6. Dear politicians you need no reminder from us of the power of speech. Words have the potential to build and to destroy. Be responsible in your utterances. Work to build and promote peace. Avoid the use of inflammatory, politically charged and derogatory language. These can easily fan hatred and incite violence. As you campaign, let your campaign managers and followers take heed of your example, and be agents of peace. Let the values of love, justice, peace, unity, tolerance and harmony characterize this year's campaigns. Peace begins with each one of us. In your roles, be ambassadors of peace. Let no blood be shed in your name and for your vote. Remember, "The blood shed in the land cries out to God." (Gen 4: 10).

7. To the media houses we appeal to you: "Take Courage! Stand up..." let it be known that we have a responsible media. Most people, who do not attend campaign rallies, are informed through your news coverage. Be non-partisan, cover all parties in the same manner. Be factual in your reports. Report without fear or favour. Avoid misrepresentations and biased reporting. Let your role be that of midwifery, enable all politicians to be heard. It is not for you to be mouthpieces of particular parties. We strongly appeal to you that you stand up and be counted in peace building. Be credible sources of information that people can turn to as they seek to discern who to vote for. May you not be accused of creating an un-level playing field, by aligning yourself with a particular party and pushing its agenda. To you is given a huge responsibility of informing people in the land, be ethical and be fair.

8. To the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC): to you is given the important mandate of preparing, facilitating and delivering credible, free and fair elections. "Take Courage! Stand Up..." and work to deliver on your mandate. Attend to the concerns that the citizens are raising and address them. Be people of absolute integrity and objectivity.

9. To the members of the security sector: we appeal to you "Take Courage! Stand up..." work to maintain justice and peace. Let all the perpetrators of political violence and those who employ hate speech be held accountable for their actions and words. Be present in political rallies and ensure that all parties are cleared and given equal opportunities to reach any part of the country in their campaigns. Let no citizen usurp your power by 'manning entrances' to some districts, thus denying parties' access to the electorate.

10. To the Judicial Officers and the Courts of the land: "Take Courage! Stand up..." We affirm you and rely on you to serve the nation with wisdom, integrity and justice.

11. As we appeal to the different sectors in the land, we would like to encourage all citizens to make this election different: let it be characterized by peace. Just as they said to the Blind man, "Take Courage! Stand up he is calling you," as citizens let us take courage, stand up and be counted. Let us make our voices be heard, through the ballot. It is our right and our duty to choose our leaders. In so doing we express our freedom. As we participate in this exercise of common discernment, let us remember who we are: children of God imbued with human dignity. Let that dignity shine forth as we make our choices in peace. Let us all be responsible citizens who, after all has come and gone, will be remembered as men and women of that generation who were so united that their ideological differences could not divide them. If anything, they remained united as they celebrated their unity in diversity.

12. To all those, far and wide, who care deeply about Zimbabwe and her people: pray, pray, pray, remembering that: "...The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective." (James 5:16). This is something that is also echoed by the writer of the letter of Peter when he says, "... the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." (1 Peter 3:12).

**Prayer:**

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace: where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal Life. Amen<sup>1</sup>

**+ Rt. Rev. Bishop Paul Horan, O.Carm. Bishop of Mutare - ZCBC President.**

**+ Rt. Rev. Bishop Raymond Mupandasekwa, C.Ss.R. Bishop of Chinhoyi -ZCBC Vice President.**

**+ Rt. Rev. Bishops Rudolf Nyandoro, Bishop of Gweru and Apostolic Administrator of Gokwe Diocese - ZCBC Secretary.**

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<sup>1</sup> Prayer of St Francis of Assisi

- + Mt Rev. Archbishop Robert C. Ndlovu, Archbishop of Harare and Apostolic Administrator of Masvingo Diocese.**
- + Mt. Rev. Archbishop Alex Thomas, Archbishop of Bulawayo.**
- + Rt. Rev. Bishop Raphael M. M. Ncube, Bishop of Hwange.**