



## **Remarks by Dr. Stephen Snook, IFES Chief of Party, Zimbabwe**

**July 18, 2018**

**Chargé d’Affaires of Canada**

**Commissioner General of the Zimbabwe Republic Police**

**National Director of Public Prosecutions,**

**ZRP Commander of the harmonized elections,**

**Representatives of WCoZ, ZPP and ZWLA,**

**Members of the media,**

**Distinguished guests,**

**As one customarily says in this part of the world, all protocol observed.**

I would like to start by recognizing our distinguished participants. While we are sad that the Ambassador of Canada, René Cremonese, was called away by other duties to Botswana, we are very happy to have Canada’s Chargé d’Affaires with us. We are extremely pleased that the ZRP’s Commissioner-General and the Commander of the 2018 harmonized elections have both found time to participate. I thank the office of the Prosecutor-General for allowing the National Director of Public Prosecutions to join us here. And I am especially thrilled to have the three wonderful partners you see here before you, WCoZ, ZPP and ZWLA.

Let me not forget to thank the funder, Canada’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and its implementing agency Global Affairs Canada, or GAC. Without their financial support, this project would not exist.

I am honored to be living in beautiful Zimbabwe and serving as the country director of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) during this momentous time, as the people of Zimbabwe write the next chapter in their history.

We know that Ambassador Cremonese is watching the launch of this project with great interest from Botswana. We know that GAC is watching from Pretoria, and from Ottawa. In fact, it is no exaggeration to say the whole world is watching Zimbabwe right now, I dare say with bated breath, as the events now underway unfold.

The organization I represent, IFES, is watching too. Since its founding in 1987, IFES has worked to advance good governance and support all citizens' rights to participate in free, fair and credible elections. Violence against women in politics is a substantial threat to the integrity of the electoral process that has a powerful effect on women's participation as voters, as candidates, as election officials, as activists, and as political party leaders. IFES works to document, to prevent, and to end violence against women in politics through applied field research and through our projects on four continents.

Today we are launching the newest of these projects.

IFES is committed, and I am committed to fighting the problem of violence against women. And so I was thrilled when Jennifer Cooper of Global Affairs Canada reached out to me from her office in Pretoria. She was acting on the recommendation of Joost Van Der Zwan of the UK's DFID to ask if IFES had any idea how GAC resources might be used to fight the problem of violence against women during the run-up to Zimbabwe's 2018 harmonized elections.

Oh my goodness, did we have ideas! Over the course of April, May and June, this project was conceived and finally born. I would like to recognize the crucial role played in IFES headquarters of Gabrielle Bardall, who directs IFES' gender programs worldwide, and here in Zimbabwe the role played by Gift Murombo, who will be collating the data generated by this project, each data point the case of an individual victim of violence, and tracking those cases for the project using advanced technology. We intend to report on cases being brought into the criminal justice system as frequently as we can.

This project comes as a propitious moment in Zimbabwe's history. Our early contacts with the Zimbabwe Republic Police quickly revealed the police are committed at the highest level to enforcing President Mnangagwa's policy of zero tolerance for violence in the elections. Our early contacts with the National Prosecuting Authority revealed the prosecutors are equally ready and eager to bring cases to trial. And our contacts with the magistrates serving in the special elections courts have revealed they will try these cases on a fast track basis.

As the chairperson of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, Justice Priscilla Chigumba, has repeatedly said, "These cases must result in convictions!"

But cases begin with victims, or survivors, coming forward to file charges. If the police are ready, and the prosecutors are ready, and the magistrates are ready, who will help victims bring their cases into the criminal justice system?

Someone must help victims file charges with the police, which will enable the police to demonstrate their resolve to enforce the president's policy of zero tolerance. If someone helps a victim press charges, and the police gather solid evidence and make an arrest, this will enable the prosecutors to demonstrate their own resolve to bring such cases swiftly to the special election courts, where the magistrates tell us, they are prepared to try these cases on a fast track basis.

But who will help the victims? Shortly you will be hearing from the project's three partners. WCoZ, ZPP and ZWLA will play the central role of providing assistance to victims. They will individually tell you

about themselves, so I will simply say that after the formal portion of this event, I hope everyone can visit their tables in the back of the room, and learn more about their missions.

There is another aspect to the project that I must mention. This aspect addresses the problem of a certain type of violence committed in cyberspace. This type of violence harms not the person, but the person's dignity and reputation. Because of its nature, it harms women more gravely than men. I'm sure all of us are aware of the things being said about people online. I don't need to explain why this is a problem. The project we are launching will be monitoring this type of violence online, which brings me to an important point. Zimbabwe's lawmakers and its legal profession will have the opportunity to act on the information this project will amass on violence in cyberspace. If Zimbabwe moves to effectively criminalize the violence currently being committed online in ways that enable victims to find recourse to justice, this would be a pioneering effort that would move Zimbabwe to the forefront of the world.

Cases must result in convictions, as ZEC Chairperson Justice Chigumba has said, and there is an important detail I must share, something I have learned from the lawyers among our partners. In Zimbabwe, the prescription of offenses is 20 years. We can all do the arithmetic. 2,018 minus 20 is 1,998. When we asked them, our friends at the police have said that if charges are pressed for cases from years past, they will investigate, and if there is evidence, they will make arrests. And our friends at the prosecuting authority have told us, if cases from years past have solid evidence, they will prosecute.

Let me turn again to a personal note to drive home my point. This work is important, for the future of this great country, because many of those in the wider world who are watching will be making important decisions based on what they observe in the coming weeks.

As I said, my father lectured for three years at the University of Zimbabwe. From 1987 to 1990 he and my mother lived in Harare. My wife and I traveled here from what was then Zaire for the birth of our eldest daughter, in 1989, at Mbuya Nehanda Maternity Hospital. Today my father is a retired professor of theology. Before that, when I was a growing up, he was a parish pastor. If he were here today instead of me, this likely would be a lecture, or a sermon. My father might choose as his topic the parable of the Good Samaritan. Why might he choose this topic? Because we have been talking about helping women victims – or survivors of violence – see justice done. But women are not the only victims of violence. And so, like the good Samaritan who did not ride past the man he saw lying beaten and bloody by the side of the road, but rather bandaged his wounds and took him to be cared for, this project will not exclude anyone. This project will assist any victim of violence who asks for help, be it a woman or a man, and I would like to cite one victim I hope might serve as our first test case.

Yesterday that great organization with a storied past, ZimRights, released a report of a man beaten up in Mandara for wearing the tee shirt of a political party. I would like to call on ZimRights to reach out and ask that man if he would like to file charges with the police, and if the man does, to help him do so. If ZimRights cannot, I call on the three partners to try. And in parallel I respectfully ask the police if they can find the man, and ask the man if he wants to press charges. And if the man files charges, I trust the police will investigate thoroughly, as they have pledged, and will follow the evidence to make the necessary arrests. And once arrests are made, I trust the prosecuting authority will bring the case swiftly

to court. And when the case comes to the special election court, I trust the magistrate there will try it on a fast track basis.

I say this because the project we are launching today can contribute significantly to the realization of my hope, and indeed of my prayer, a prayer which is shared by many friends of Zimbabwe, where my daughter was born, that this wonderful land and its people will emerge from the 2018 harmonized elections on a trajectory, on a pathway to reach Zimbabwe's enormous potential.

And so, permit me to close by saying, it is my fervent hope that the harmonized elections of 2018 will demonstrate to all the world that in the new and emerging Zimbabwe, justice will be done!

Thank you.