



## **STATEMENT**

### **UPR Pre-session of Zimbabwe**

**08 December 2021**

#### **Upholding the rights of children in alternative care especially residential child care facilities and foster care.**

Honorable representatives of the Permanent Missions,

It is a pleasure for me to address this assembly to present issues on children's rights in particular children in alternative care in my country, Zimbabwe. The network works to improve the quality of life for children in alternative care and care leavers in Zimbabwe.

My statement addresses three issues namely: (1) the right to identity and nationality, (2) the right to social security, and (3) the right to survival and development.

#### **I. The right to identity and nationality**

Many children have no birth certificates and some even reach 18 years without having such a document. This has greatly affected children in alternative care and more than 55% are girls. This hinders the right to participate, nationality and identity of the child. Within alternative care, the government through the Department of Social Development (DSD) have the mandate to acquire within 42 days (Births and Deaths Registration Act, Chapter 5:02, section 11 (2 a)) from birth of the child. The Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013) section 81, the Children's Act Chapter 5:06, the National Residential Child Care Standards (2017) and the Foster Care Handbook (2018) stipulates that social workers should timely take birth certificates for children who would be placed in residential child care facilities and foster care. But, for many children and care leavers this is not the case, as their birth certificates were taken after months and mostly after years, while the child lives at the residential child care facilities and foster care without a birth certificate. According to the National Baseline Survey on children in need of parental care (Residential Child Care Facilities) (2014), 45% of the 3 977 children in residential child care facilities had no birth certificates, while according to the Foster Care Baseline Survey (2018), 57% of the 532 children in foster care had no birth certificates, while. The lack of a timely acquiring of the document has been attributed to the work-load of government's social workers and grossly insufficient resources towards the DSD, as the main obstacles. An assessment of the DSD capacity done in 2012 showed that, the ratio of social worker to client stood at 1:49 000. Some care leavers testified that their birth certificates were taken when they were 17 or 18 years old while they entered care at the age of between 1 and 3 years, and in some instances, were discharged without. The network up to date has assisted more than 21 care leavers to take their birth certificates at different ages beyond 18 years and females were 16 out of the 21. However



efforts have been made through the mobile birth registration done by two government ministries, to issue birth certificates for children in residential child care facilities. The exercise saw many children being issued with short/ abridged birth certificates. Still there are children in residential care and care leavers who do not have birth certificates. This deprives children and care leavers from enjoying their rights especially, to identity, nationality, voting, and access to education even participation in extracurricular activities like sports, and access to descent work among other deprivations.

### **Recommendations**

We encourage Member States to recommend that the Government of Zimbabwe:

- **Ensure timely acquisition of birth certificates for all children including those in alternative care.**
- **Carry out mobile birth registration at least thrice a year throughout the country also targeting children in residential child care facilities, foster care and care leavers.**
- **Ensure that children do not exit alternative care especially residential child care facilities and foster care without vital registration documents like birth certificates and national identity cards.**

## **II. The right to social security**

The Constitution of Zimbabwe Section 30 provides that the state must take practical measures within the limits of the resources available to it, to provide social security and social care to those who are in need. Financing for alternative care is supposed to be covered by the budget line; Children in Difficult Circumstances Fund. Each child with a valid court order receives ZW\$1 500 which is equivalent to USD\$11.20 per month to cover school fees, purchase of food, payment of utility bills etc. Unfortunately this budget line is not well financed to meet the needs in the child, is disbursed on an irregular basis and the amount is grossly insufficient. According to the Zimbabwe Statistics Agency (2020), the changes in the cost of living especially basket of goods and services consumed by an average urban household of 5 people had increased by 953.36% in April 2020 as compared to 810.40% in April 2019. Consequently, residential child care facilities and foster parents increasingly find it difficult to provide for the basic needs of institutionalized children due to inflationary pressures.

### **Recommendations**

We encourage Member States to recommend that the Government of Zimbabwe:



- **Increase and regularly provide support towards alternative care in particular residential child care facilities and foster care.**
- **Review and adjust regularly the Children in Difficult Circumstances Fund given to children using the Consumer Price Index reports.**
- **Include all children in residential childcare facilities and foster care on Basic Education Assistance Module for the children to have access to education.**

### **III. The right to survival and development**

The government through Department of Social Development (DSD) discharges children at the age of 18 years or below from residential child care facilities and foster care without offering any aftercare support for their continuation of survival and development. This has made many care leavers to resort to social ills like crime, early marriages, child marriages, drug and substance abuse, prostitution, begging, working and living on the streets, among other ills to survive. Once a discharge letter has been written by DSD, most of the important support including accommodation and educational support is stopped. However “the government of Zimbabwe has no policy and national programs for young people who have left residential care in Zimbabwe”, said a top government official in 2020 during a parliamentary oral evidence session. The number of both registered and unregistered residential child care facilities has been increasing with 54 being recorded in 2004, while 102 in 2014 and unofficial by 202 more than 415. The official number of care leavers being discharged per year has not been recorded yet, but according to the consultation with care leavers in preparation of this report, an estimate of about 350 – 450 care leavers are discharged per year in Zimbabwe.

### **Recommendations**

We encourage Member States to recommend that the Government of Zimbabwe:

- **Put in place an Aftercare Act and a dedicated fund in order to provide the necessary aftercare support services to all care leavers throughout the country, regardless of the form of care they are leaving from.**
- **Provide adequate social protection, including through safety nets, to disadvantaged groups, particularly the care leavers.**