



## PRESS RELEASE

### **Urgent Call: Protect the Right to Life, Dignity and Democracy in Zimbabwe !**

We the leaders of the World Council of Churches, Lutheran World Federation, World Alliance of Reformed Churches, World YWCA and the World Student Christian Federation – enjoined by the Zimbabwe Advocacy Office in Geneva, hereby make this solemn and urgent statement in the wake of the latest Extra-Ordinary Summit of the SADC Heads of States on the crises in Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

We are deeply disappointed and saddened that the SADC leadership and Zimbabwe's political leaders have once again squandered an opportunity to take decisive, credible and transformative action in the interests of the right to life, dignity and democracy in Zimbabwe. By failing to fully address the growing humanitarian catastrophe and question of illegitimacy of the current government, SADC leaders have let down the people of Zimbabwe who dutifully went to vote for a new government on March 29, 2008 and are today still waiting for a government of their choice. It is time to give priority to the people through servant leadership instead of self-serving power politics. It is also time for Africa's leaders to face up to each other with honesty and truth and take firm decisions that will provide a foundation for a durable solution to the protracted crisis in Zimbabwe.

Since August a severe cholera outbreak has claimed hundreds of lives and more are dying everyday across the country. People living with HIV/AIDS have no access to life-saving drugs or food. Schools and hospitals are closing daily because there are no teachers, doctors, nurses or medicines. Millions of Zimbabweans are starving despite the best efforts of aid agencies. Church leaders in Zimbabwe have confirmed that many are now surviving on wild fruit. Gaining access to water, food, electricity and even cash from the bank has become a daily nightmare for ordinary Zimbabweans. Everyday women and children are bearing the brunt of these hardships as providers, care-givers and vulnerable members of society.

Yet amidst all this suffering the state finds itself guilty of misappropriating funds mobilised to buy life saving drugs for the sick as well as providing jobs for at least 50,000 Zimbabweans in the health sector. Up to 4 million Zimbabweans find themselves trapped in Southern Africa and beyond, unable to return home in the absence of a credible resolution of the political and economic meltdown. With a hungry and demoralised civil service, no one is taking proper responsibility to ensure accountable and efficient public service delivery.

As we call for an urgent affirmation and protection of the right to life and dignity for all Zimbabweans, we also call for adherence to democratic principles and processes in the mediation process and a return of the rule of law inside Zimbabwe. Since the current negotiations began in 2007, ordinary Zimbabwean people have been further and further excluded from a process that affects their present and future. We further note with great sadness reports of escalating violence and violations against human rights defenders, especially Zimbabwean women and youth organisations calling for an end to the humanitarian crisis.

- We therefore call on the SADC Facilitator, SADC and the African Union to enhance transparency and broaden the talks to include civil society and churches to bring in voices from the streets, townships and villages. African leaders must re-commit themselves to protecting the integrity of elections and the right of citizens to freely elect governments of their choice.
- We further call upon the ZANU PF party and the MDC to form a government based on the will of the voters, true equity and in the interest of real and durable political progress, socio-economic transformation and national healing. Unilateral decisions on the formation of the new government will only lead to further international isolation and exacerbate the suffering and misery in Zimbabwe.
- We also call upon Zimbabwe's uniformed forces to treat their fellow citizens humanely and with respect. To politicians that have lost their conscience and seek to profit from the misery of fellow Zimbabweans, the world is watching. Justice as we have witnessed elsewhere in the world, will one day be served.
- We also call upon the United Nations, the European Union and especially the President-elect of the United States of America, Barack Obama to mobilise and increase direct humanitarian support for the long-suffering people of Zimbabwe.
- To international human rights and humanitarian agencies please keep your focus on Zimbabwe and diligently exercise your responsibility to protect the right to life in this country.
- To the people of Zimbabwe please hold onto hope. Be encouraged by the word of God, 'Return to your stronghold, O you prisoners of hope ; today I declare that I will restore to you double' (*Zechariah 9:12*). We stand in steadfast solidarity with you and keep you in our hearts and prayers – justice, peace and prosperity are surely at hand. Your suffering is not in vain.

**Issued at Geneva,  
Friday, 14 November 2008**

**Signed :**

1. Rev Dr Samuel Kobia, General Secretary - **World Council of Churches**
2. Rev Dr Ishmael Noko, General Secretary – **Lutheran World Federation**
3. Rev Dr Setri Nyomi, General Secretary - **World Alliance of Reformed Churches**
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