

Statement on the protection of children and their families.

Safe Learning Institutions Initiative.

29 January 2019

We, the Safe Learning Institutions Initiative (SLII), are concerned about the many reports concerning serious violations of human rights over the past two weeks, that have been cited by both human rights groups and the media.

These events have revealed serious violations against children, their families, and those responsible for their welfare, including teachers. When people are not safe in their homes and teachers are not safe in undertaking legitimate protest, then all safeguards have been removed from the most vulnerable sector of our country, the children.

Concerns raised by authoritative bodies as the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission, as well as Zimbabwean churches, human rights and civil society organisations, have been corroborated by the state itself with the admission that some soldiers are implicated in the violations.

We wish to pay particular attention to the children of Zimbabwe. There is need to ensure their safety and to ensure that their education does not suffer as it has done in the past.

We note that this is not the first time that children and teachers have been under threat. There is a repetitive cycle. During the 2008 elections, children were direct victims of political violence, where attacks on teachers, and the closure of many schools saw Zimbabwe become a country of concern to the Global Campaign to Protect Education under Attack (GCPEA).

In the past two weeks, the country has witnessed the abductions, torture and arrest of teachers exercising their constitutional right to protest. Previously it had witnessed doctors making similar protest, and industrial action. These actions continue to draw attention to the serious consequences of the economic crisis that now afflicts the country, and consequences that have profound implications for the well-being of children.

The need to protect teachers and learning institutions was the subject of decision by the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission in 2018. This decision was an effort to ensure that children and learning institutions were not disrupted during political events, and was supported by a court decision.

There are numerous reports of attacks by state agents on ordinary citizens on their homes, and even cases where children themselves have been victims of political violence. Furthermore, it is obvious that many children have been witnesses to violence inflicted on one or other of their parents. This is utterly unacceptable, and it is the responsibility of the Government to ensure that such things do not happen.

When teachers are not safe in making legitimate protest, when children are not safe in their homes, when children witness violence meted out to their parents, then all safety for children has been removed. Furthermore, both the direct experience of political violence and the witnessing of the same will have serious consequences for the mental health of children.

Thus, we draw the attention of the Government to the Safe Schools Declaration of the Global Campaign to Protect Education under Attack. We call upon the GCPEA Steering Committee and all 83 countries, especially those in Africa, that are signatory to the Declaration to apply

immediate pressure upon the Government of Zimbabwe to desist from any actions that might jeopardise the welfare of children, their families, and the institutions and the personnel in those institutions. This is in light of the international effort under the United Nations to ensure that children are not victims of organised violence and torture or their education disrupted as supported by the UN Security Council Resolutions 1998 (2011) and 2143 (2014) on Children and Armed Conflict.

If teachers and parents are not safe from political violence, then children will be the indirect victims, and the future of the country is at serious risk.

Amalgamated Rural Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (ARTUZ)
Research and Advocacy Unit Trust (RAU)
Students Christian Movement of Zimbabwe (SCMZ)
Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum
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The GCPEA Steering Committee is as follows: CARA (Council for At-Risk Academics), Human Rights Watch (HRW), Institute of International Education/ IIE Scholar Rescue Fund, Plan International, Protect Education in Insecurity and Conflict (PEIC), a program of the Education Above All Foundation, Save the Children, UNICEF, UNESCO, and UNHCR.