

The Women's Charter

Shortened Version

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PREAMBLE

We, the women of Zimbabwe, as full citizens making up over half the Zimbabwean people;

Claiming the birth right of every human being to have freedom and equality;

Having contributed equally to the development of the nation throughout its history;

Having contributed equally to the struggle for the independence of our nation;

Having suffered oppression through patriarchy, custom and tradition, colonialism, racism, male-dominated dictatorship and capitalism;

Finding ourselves still discriminated against in law, politics, business, society, culture and religion;

As workers in every sphere of national life;

As the mothers of the people and of future generations –

DEMAND . . .

- A constitution, laws and policies that make women and men equal;
- To be recognised for our role in founding and developing the country;
- To take part fully and equally in our nation;
- No more oppression;
- No more discrimination against women in public life, at work and at home;
- The extra opportunities for women to put right the imbalances of the past and build equality in the future;
- Personal safety, protection for our property and no more violence against women;
- A plan of action, a time frame and the resources to make these demands possible.

EQUALTY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

Women claim full equality with men. Women must be equal under the constitution, under the law, in politics, business, public life and in homes. The nation must recognise the wrongs of the past and give women extra opportunities. Discrimination must be forbidden.

Women must have equal rights within the family and to custody of children. They must play an equal role in making decisions in all aspects of family life.

Women must have equal rights to earn their living. Brothers and sisters must have equal rights to inherit, equal rights to land and housing and equal access to other natural resources and funds. Laws must support this.

Women must have the right to support from the state and the right to education.

The state must encourage positive images of women in the newspapers and on television and discourage stereotypes.

Culture and religion are important but they must never be used to justify discrimination against women.

LAW AND ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

Laws must support, protect and promote equality of rights and opportunities for women and girls. Both men and women, boys and girls, must be able to use the law to protect their rights.

Women must be part of the country's justice system, including the customary system. They must have extra opportunities to take their place as equal decision makers in how the laws are made and put into practice and how all the courts are run.

The law must support women's right to make decisions about their own lives. Women and men must have equal rights and duties as parents.

The justice system must be friendly to those who use it and victim friendly, especially for victims of rape, domestic violence and child abuse.

Mentally or physically disabled people must be helped and protected whenever they have to deal with the law or the courts.

People who run the courts must not be influenced by anything except fair judgement and women must be equally represented at all levels of the justice system.

Anyone working in the courts must be gender sensitive and make decisions that protect the rights and interests of women.

Any citizens who want to protect their rights but cannot afford a lawyer must be given free help and advice. There must be a special budget set aside for this.

Police officers must treat everyone equally; they must treat women with respect and as equal to men. The police must protect women against all forms of violence.

All citizens must have free and full access to information about their legal and constitutional rights provided by the state.

PROPERTY, RESOURCES, LAND AND THE ENVIRONMENT

All women should have the right to take full part in the economy.

Women must have the right to own or occupy land in their own name and as individuals.

Everyone has the right to a clean, healthy environment and the protection of that environment. Women and men have equal rights to natural resources.

Women must have the same rights as men to own, buy and use farming, housing and industrial land. Women and men must have equal rights to property from their marriage and their families. Both husband and wife must own rights to their land and housing.

Government must resettle both women and men on the land using clear and fair rules known by everyone. That way, women can apply for and be given resettlement land.

Women's rights to own and control any goods or property must be recognised.

Women must have the right to enter and pursue careers of their own choice.

Women have rights to full employment including the right to develop and be promoted. The state and employers must give women maternity benefits and set up child-care facilities in all work places and communities.

Women must have equal access to loans and other facilities in their own right. Government must provide special credit and loan facilities for women.

Women must retain rights and control over what they produce, their own incomes and any sale of their produce.

The state must work with local communities so the communities benefit from the local resources. Any use of local resources must improve local business and employment.

Any use of resources must be done without spoiling the environment.

All citizens, regardless of where they live in Zimbabwe must have access to clean water and safe sanitation.

CULTURE AND RELIGION

All cultural and religious practices that discriminate against women, whether in public life or at home, must be eliminated. All laws and policies that discriminate against women on the basis of their marital status must be abolished.

The state must ensure that all forms of marriage, including unregistered customary marriages, are recognised equally and give equal rights to each spouse. Women must have the right to freely choose their own marriage partners. Partners to a marriage must have equal rights in matters regarding the marriage and children.

Lobola/roora must not be used to oppress women. It is a token of the relationship between two families. It must not influence any rights or entitlements within that marriage. Where lobola/roora is exchanged between families, women, as the mothers and nurturers of the bride, must have an equal share of the lobola/roora received.

Women must have the right to take part in the cultural, artistic and sporting life of the nation.

The state must ensure that women with disabilities have the opportunity to enjoy their womanhood; they must have educational rights and the right to participate in cultural and sporting activities.

Women must have the freedom to decide whether to have children and how many children to have regardless of religious, cultural or ethnic considerations. Women with disabilities must also have this right to choose and the right to a family.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

There is violence against women and girl children in the family and in the community. Men beat their wives. But violence is not a private matter. Violence denies women the right to personal development, security, respect and dignity. Victims of violence must be given advice and shelter.

Domestic violence must be against the law.

Rape sentences must be more severe where a victim is infected with disease, in particular with the HIV/AIDS virus.

Women must be treated with respect by help agents such as the police, medical staff and counsellors.

The law must recognise that a husband can rape his wife. The law must protect women against sexual harassment, all forms of abuse and assault. Sexual harassment must be made a criminal offence.

WOMEN AND GOVERNANCE

Women must have the right to participate fully at all levels of political, civic and community life. Women must be made aware of these rights.

Government and all political parties must ensure that women participate equally and are represented equally in national and local decision-making bodies.

They must have a system so that women hold the same number of positions as men.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Through education, every citizen has the opportunity to develop the nation. Girl children have had less opportunity for education. Educating the girl child must be a priority for the state and the society.

Every child must have access to free, compulsory and quality education. The state must provide free education at least through to the end of secondary school.

To put right the wrongs of the past, women must be given extra opportunities at higher education institutions. More women teachers and administrators must be hired to ensure equal participation of women in education policy-making and the management of educational institutions.

Women and girls must not be denied their right to education on the basis of sex, gender, pregnancy, marital status, physical or mental disability or age. Child-care facilities must be established in schools or training institutions for the benefit of children, teachers and students.

Female students must not be restricted in their choice of subjects or courses on the basis of gender stereotypes. Female students must be encouraged to participate equally in the fields of science and technology. Textbooks must be revised to eliminate gender stereotyping of women.

Female students must be protected from violence, including physical and sexual abuse and harassment, in all schools, universities and training institutions. Sex and human rights education must be part of the curriculum from primary through to secondary school, as well as in skills training and adult education programmes.

Gender awareness training must be part of the training of all teachers.

The state must promote African languages by making the home languages the languages of instruction in schools.

HEALTH, REPRODUCTIVE AND SEXUAL RIGHTS

The continuing spread of HIV/AIDS is devastating. Women, especially poor women, are becoming infected because of their disadvantaged position in society. The state, society and the private sector must provide: Information about sexuality, contraception and sexually transmitted diseases, affordable treatment for people living with HIV/AIDS and free contraception to both women and men. Women must have access to the full range of contraceptives free of charge and to full information about each option.

Women and children have the right to access free or affordable quality health care. Women must have access to reproductive health and family planning services.

Women have the right to free or affordable maternal care, including pre-natal, labour and post-natal care.

Health care services and service providers must be responsive to the needs of disabled women.

Women have the right to control their bodies and their sexuality. So women must have the right to choose their sexual partners, the right to decide on when and how often to have sex and the right to refuse sex, even within marriage. Women must have the right to decide when and how often they want to have children.

Women and children must be treated with respect and dignity at all health and family planning facilities.

INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS

All international conventions signed by the Government of Zimbabwe promoting human and women's rights should be automatically put into domestic law.

The government must educate all people on what these conventions mean. They must be translated into all the vernacular languages.

Preserving peace and declaring war affect women profoundly. Women must be equally represented at all levels in the making of any such decisions and in conducting such negotiations.

PUTTING IT INTO ACTION

A Gender Commission must be established to put all of these demands into action. The national budget must provide adequate funding for the Commission.

Extra training must be given to writers and researchers to make their work sensitive to gender issues.

Government, political parties, the private sector and civil society organisations should bring gender into the mainstream in all aspects of their management, policies, programmes, procedures and organisational behaviour.

Public interest litigation must be established to enforce women and gender rights.

We must constantly watch the gender implications of policies, budgets and legislation.

The Women's Charter is a document that contains Zimbabwean Women's constitutional, legislative and policy demands. The Women's Charter was drawn up through a process of consultation with a significant number of women through national and regional meetings throughout the country, which were facilitated by the Women's Coalition.

The aim of the Women's Charter is to . . .

- Raise awareness on the human rights issues that are fundamental to women;
- Lobby all the relevant structures in the country, like government and parliament, to take action on the issues contained in the charter with the aim of improving women's lives and guaranteeing gender equality;
- Facilitate the mainstreaming of gender equality and equity in all sectors of Zimbabwean life.

The Women's Coalition

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