ADDRESS BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE ZIMBABWE ASSOCIATION OF DOCTORS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (ZADHR) MR CALVIN FAMBIRAI ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD HEALTH DAY COMMEMORATIONS, 7 APRIL 2017, EPWORTH, HARARE.

Chairperson of the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC), Commissioner Elasto Hilarious Mugwadi

The Chairperson of the Epworth Residents Development Association, Mr. Daniel Foya

Commissioners and staff from the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission

ZADHR staff here present

The Director of ERDA, Mr. Promise Makaka and ERDA Staff in attendance

Members of the Civil Society and Development Partners

Residents of Epworth and representatives here present.

Members of the Media Fraternity

Ladies and gentlemen
I wish to welcome you all to this important day where we join the world in celebrating the World Health Day 2017.

World Health Day is celebrated annually and it presents the world and Zimbabwe in particular with an opportunity to take stock of gains and misses towards the enjoyment of the right to health by all Zimbabweans.

We are honored to celebrate this day in Epworth. To celebrate this day we have adopted a localized theme that speaks to the lives and aspirations of the people of this community. To that end, the theme for this event is, ‘ENHANCE ACCESS TO WASH INFRASTRUCTURE: ENHANCE THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF EPWORTH RESIDENTS’.

Chairperson of the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission, we have brought you here to attest to the challenges faced by the residents of Epworth. These relate to water, sanitation and hygiene and we believe the situation here presents key human rights concerns particularly when understood in the context of our constitution.

Ladies and gentlemen, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) is one of the urgent global public health issues, which are also included in the Strategic Development Goals (SDGs) number six (6). Those SDGs refer to universal and equitable access to safe water and sanitation through strengthening the participation of local communities for improved water and sanitation management. In fact, research has shown that thousands of children and adults die everyday due to lack of access to clean and safe water.

Equipped with such knowledge and determination to improve the health and wellbeing of Epworth residents, ZADHR and the Epworth Residents Development Association partnered for the purpose of enhancing the water, sanitation and hygiene situation in Epworth through research, training and advocacy.

A rapid public health assessment carried out by ERDA and ZADHR in February 2017 to determine the extent of the problem and proffer recommendations towards improved living conditions for the communities reveals that the Epworth population has continued to increase without corresponding synchrony with the development of infrastructure to support the water,
sanitation and hygiene needs of the residents.

The absence of a systematic WASH infrastructure has seen households unable to access minimum volumes of clean water; with reliance on pit latrines and increased likelihood of overflowing effluent. Poor enforcement of public health regulations on food handling and vendor hygiene manifested through the vending of meat, fish and offals from buckets, bins and street corners further predisposes the residents to diarrheal diseases.

The study also highlighted the gendered nature of the lack of proper WASH infrastructure. Women bear the brunt of looking for water for the families. Together with the children, women also carry the water from the water points and are responsible for family hygiene as well as planning refuse disposal. They are also caregivers to those that suffer diarrheal diseases.

ZADHR therefore urges duty bearers to avoid being complicit in adding undue hardship on women by continuing to neglect their mandate towards WASH infrastructure development.

As ZADHR we also contend that due to its proximity to Harare which has suffered almost perennial epidemics of communicable diarrheal diseases of typhoid and cholera, with high morbidity and mortality levels, Epworth poses a continued risk.

In light of the above we therefore recommend that;

· Rationalization of stands should put emphasis on water and sanitation through the development of water and sewage reticulation systems, which if the requisite services are provided, will enhance revenue generation for the local board.

· The Epworth Local Board priorities resumption of requisite services to wards 2, 3, 4, 5 and some sections of Ward 6 which already have water and sewage reticulation infrastructure while also working on the servicing of areas which lack the same in some sections of the wards.
· The Local Board institute sustainable rights-based, inter-sectoral solutions for domestic waste management with appropriate technologies for ablutions as well as household refuse with consideration for the needs of the elderly and disabled residents.

· Investment in the capacity of staff and the clinic infrastructure in WASH disaster management.

· Strict enforcement of public health statutes on vendor hygiene and public food handling.

· The Local Board must establish and strengthen feedback mechanisms for enhanced responsiveness, transparency and accountability on service delivery issues.

· The Local Board broaden the budget making consultative process to make the process all inclusive thereby promoting effective residents participation and prioritization of issues.

Ladies and gentlemen, Chairperson of the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission and residents of Epworth, you will notice that my speech has centered largely on Epworth. However, let me point out that the challenge of access to water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure is not limited to Epworth but is shared by other local authorities in Zimbabwe.

Harare is currently smarting from a typhoid crisis. According to the Ministry of Health and Child Care the cumulative typhoid figures nationally from 1 January to 30 March 2017 are 1,934 suspected cases, 59 confirmed cases and 5 deaths. Zimbabwe cannot afford such high incidents rates from avoidable diseases, let alone Harare.

The conditions that are fertile for the outbreak of typhoid and other diarrheal diseases such as cholera as highlighted earlier on also prevail in Harare, Gweru and Chitungwiza among other urban centres.

Urban authorities must therefore make sustainable long term interventions that discourage
the outbreak and spread of diseases and seek to improve the health and wellbeing of residents that include but not limited to attending to burst sewer pipes, regular collection of garbage and provision of safe drinking water. Accelerating access to WASH infrastructure will save lives.

As ZADHR, we contend that exposure to health risk is a violation of the right to health. Therefore, access to WASH infrastructure is a concern of the right.

I thank you!!!