The Zimbabwe Association of Doctors for Human Rights (ZADHR) continues to monitor the coronavirus pandemic and national response in Zimbabwe. Globally, the pandemic continues to spread exponentially, and tens of thousands having lost their lives to this disease. In Africa, South Africa has become the epicentre of the disease with over a thousand confirmed infections. Zimbabwe has to date reported seven confirmed cases and one death according to government updates. ZADHR takes this opportunity to share its position on the following facets of our COVID-19 response.

A. National Lockdown

ZADHR welcomes the national lockdown called for by government which took effect on 30 March 2020. We advise the nation that adhering to the lockdown as announced by government provides the best weapon to combat the coronavirus in Zimbabwe. Social distancing breaks the human to human transmission cycle, allows infected individuals to be identified before they pass the infection across households, towns and cities. However, we call upon the state to ensure the enforcement of the national lockdown in a manner that respects the rights of all citizens. The security forces must have adequate protective equipment and must be cautioned on violating the rights of citizens.

B. Testing

ZADHR notes with great concern the small number of COVID-19 diagnostic tests that have been conducted in Zimbabwe. We urge the Zimbabwean government to urgently roll out a mass screening and testing programme during this twenty-one-day lock down period and beyond. Testing more people allows for early identification, isolation and treatment of COVID-19 and averts the possible catastrophic effects of community transmission. To date, just under 200 tests have been done despite the over 16032 (MoHCC, 28 March 2020).
2020) returnees from countries with confirmed COVID-19 cases.

C. Ports of Entry

ZADHR calls upon the government to ensure that all returning residents into Zimbabwe are provided with State monitored isolation facilities where they are assessed for fourteen days. The current approach by the Ministry of Health and Child Care where they encourage self-isolation for returning residents is porous, lacks monitoring, and is a potential avenue for COVID-19 importation into Zimbabwe. The state must be proactive than reactive in ensuring COVID 19 cases are identified at the ports of entry as compared to picking symptomatic patients in the community.

D. Health Facilities and Preparedness

ZADHR is deeply concerned by the state of preparedness of the designated health care facilities for COVID 19 treatment. Despite assurances by the Minister of Health and Child Care that our health facilities were prepared to handle COVID-19 facilities, we received with shock reports that Wilkins Hospital has been closed for upgrades. We also note that most isolation and treatment centres across the country are in a bad state, lack intensive care facilities and are not manned by intensivists who have the required experience to handle complicated COVID-19 cases. We urge the government to ensure high levels of transparency in representation of the country's state of preparedness by the health ministry and other Government officials. We also call upon the government to urgently address the concerns raised by government nurses and doctors on the absence of Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs).

E. Vulnerable Groups and Social Protection Mechanisms
ZADHR welcomes the initiative, by the Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Press Statement on Economic Mitigatory Measures to Contain the Impact of CORONA VIRUS 2019 (COVID-19), to provide cash transfers to vulnerable households during the COVID-19 pandemic. We also acknowledge the allocation of the two percent tax towards the health sector. If used for its intended purpose it will go a long way in improving our health outcomes during this period. ZADHR has in the past consistently called for greater allocations to the health sector. We further call upon the state to come up with specific programs and policy interventions that target the elderly, those living with HIV and AIDS, those with chronic conditions and the prison populations. We advise that devising strategic social distancing initiatives targeting these vulnerable groups will ultimately reduce the number of complicated COVID 19 cases and hence the utilization of available resources towards other priority areas.

ZADHR will continuously monitors and provide routine updates on the COVID 19 pandemic in Zimbabwe.