

PRESS STATEMENT

BY THE ZIMBABWE ENVIRONMENTAL LAW ASSOCIATION (ZELA)



CHOLERA OUTBREAK AND POOR ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICE DELIVERY IN ZIMBABWE

28 November 2008

The Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association (ZELA) notes with grave concern the human, economic and social cost of the cholera epidemic in many low income urban centres in Zimbabwe. This situation is a result of poor, ineffective and in some cases non-existent environmental service delivery especially the supply of clean, safe and adequate drinking water, waste collection and sewage disposal services. The collapsing infrastructure has also significantly contributed to this state of affairs. As a result many people have died while others remain hospitalized due to cholera. Sadly, the hospitals have no drugs or nurses and doctors to attend to these people. The shortage of environmental and sanitation facilities have combined to generate a serious decrease in the quality of life for many people. Our reading of the situation is that this is not only an environmental and health crisis of unprecedented levels, but also a serious governance crisis. Due to political interference, the collapsed economy, corruption and mismanagement there has not been any systematic, coordinated and sustained effort to improve environmental health management in the country. The measures taken by Government and support agencies to address the crisis have been rather reactive than proactive in supporting environmental health programmes around the country. For a long time ZELA has in its work been pointing out the hazards to the Zimbabwean population that are posed by the unavailability of essential environmental services and urging the government and responsible agencies to take action. Had this call been heeded on time, the unnecessary deaths and suffering from cholera that we see today could have been averted. What is of concern to ZELA is the utter disregard of the people's suffering by our politicians fighting over political dominance and hegemony than striving to address the plight of the people.

ZELA strongly contends that failure by government to come up with measures to solve the current political, economic, social and environmental decay is a serious violation of the right of people to live in a clean and healthy environment that does not cause harm as provided for in Section 4 of the Environmental Management Act (Chapter 20:27). The denial of this right leads to the violation of the most fundamental right, the right to life as guaranteed in Section 12 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe. It is also a contravention of a number of international human rights instruments such as Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 which protects the right of people to an adequate standard of living, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966 which recognises the right to health, the Convention on the Rights of the Child which protects the right of children to life, safety and health and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights of 1981 which recognizes the rights of every individual to enjoy the best attainable state of physical and mental health and to receive medical

attention. Further, with the current situation it is beyond any doubt that the government of Zimbabwe will not achieve the Millennium Development Goals especially Goal Number 7, target 10 which calls on member states to work to reduce the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water by 2015.

Therefore, ZELA demands a participatory and new constitutional reform process that will result in a new constitution that guarantees every person the following; environmental, economic, social, cultural, political and civil rights. ZELA also demands the respect and protection of all that package of rights provided for in international and regional treaties to which Zimbabwe is a party. This includes the implementation and enforcement of all national laws on environmental health protection through prosecution of offenders especially those who pollute water and fail to collect waste. Further, ZELA demands expedient resolution of the political disagreements and return to the rule of law, democracy and good governance that facilitate effective service delivery. Ultimately, ZELA demands the return of the water supply and treatment functions to the local authorities from the Zimbabwe National Water Authority.

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