Minister of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare

Professor Paul Mavima

9 th Floor, Kaguvi Building

Corner S.V Muzenda Street and Central Avenue

P.Bag CY17 Causeway

Harare

Zimbabwe

Dear Professor Paul Mavima,

I write to express concern about the draft Private Voluntary Organisation (PVO) Amendment Bill that is currently under debate in parliament. As you know, the PVO bill was first introduced by the government on 5 November 2021 to ‘counter terrorism’ and prohibit private lobbying from non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In June 2022, following public consultation and submissions from various stakeholders, you presented further amendments to the bill. The latest amendments to the bill pose a serious threat to the vital work of civil society organisations that have been exposing human rights violations, holding the government accountable, and ensuring the rights of the Zimbabwean people are respected, protected, promoted and fulfilled. The proposed amendments introduce additional, excessively punitive, criminal and civil penalties for noncomplying PVOs, as well as individual liability for trustees, employees and managers of PVOs, and anyone involved in the control of a PVO, including members of the public. The bill concentrates power in the office of the Registrar, which power may be used to de-register and refuse registration to organisations which in the past have come under attack and been criticized by the government. Furthermore, the further amendments you introduced in June 2022, have far reaching material changes which were not in the original bill which the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare consulted the public on. These significant changes must be subjected to public consultation. If passed, the bill, which is now being debated in parliament – the next sitting due to take place on 20-21 August – would constitute a grave violation of the rights to freedom of expression and association, severely curtailing the work of civil society, including enabling the shutting down of some organisations which work to promote and protect human rights and call for accountability from the government. I urge you to immediately withdraw the significantly amended bill from further parliamentary debate until it is subjected to public consultation and to remove any clauses that undermine the work of civil society organizations. I also urge you to fully consider recommendations made by civil society organizations during the consultation process.

Yours sincerely,

CC: Botschaft der Republik Simbabwe, I.E. Frau Alice Mashingaidze, Kommandantenstraße 80, 10117 Berlin