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## Nhimbe Trust Decries Zimbabwe's Intention to Enact a Patriotic Act

The Government of Zimbabwe has announced that it is drafting the Zimbabwe Patriotic Bill, which amongst other things, aims to criminalise and prescribe stiff punishment for citizens who “campaign against” national interests. According to the government, the Bill will also criminalise the peddling of “falsehoods” which undermine Zimbabwe’s national interests. The proposed law will permit government to pry into private communications between citizens and officials of foreign governments. Government has said that the proposed law is necessary to “deal” with citizens who propagate negative information to foreign governments, which undermine the Government of Zimbabwe’s efforts to attract foreign direct investment.

Nhimbe Trust believes that patriotism is love for and loyalty to one’s own country, which is expressed in various ways. In certain circumstances, to be patriotic means that one has to be critical of their own government or even campaign against the government, especially when the government’s policies undermine national interests. In terms of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, democracy, peace and respect for human rights and the rule of law are amongst Zimbabwe’s national interests.

*“It must be recalled that Zimbabwe has been going through a severe human rights crisis, characterised by the Gukurahundi massacres, episodes of electoral violence, brutalization of peaceful protestors, grand corruption, muzzling of the press and arbitrary censorship of critical artists and cultural professionals. These violations are attributed to the government and to date, they remain unresolved.”*

Nhimbe Trust believes that, it is the patriotic duty of every Zimbabwean to speak out against these violations because they undermine national interests. In particular, artists have a duty to raise public awareness both locally and internationally, of the human rights violations in Zimbabwe and call upon the members of the international community to hold the Zimbabwean government accountable.

It must be recalled that Zimbabwe is part of the international community of nations by virtue of being a member of various international inter-governmental organisations, including SADC, African Union and United Nations. By virtue of such membership, Zimbabwe has committed to respect, protect and promote human rights and principles of governance that are espoused in the Conventions and Treaties agreed upon by Member States.

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Therefore, if government enacts a law which prohibits its citizens from engaging foreign governments to raise awareness of Zimbabwe's violations of international human rights, such a law would not only be in contradiction to the core principles of international co-operation, but it would also be a violation of the right to freedom of expression and the right to privacy.

These rights are protected both in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights. They are also protected in the Constitution of Zimbabwe in section 61 and section 57.

Nhimbe Trust calls upon the government of Zimbabwe to desist from enacting the Patriotic Act and rather concentrate on combatting corruption, delivering on its Electoral promises and respecting as well as protecting constitutional rights. It remains a constitutional and patriotic duty of every Zimbabwean citizen to campaign against their government if it fails to deliver on its promises and its constitutional mandate. To not do so would be unpatriotic.

*Nhimbe Trust is a Zimbabwean organisation that champions the respect and protection of cultural rights and artistic freedom.*

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