



## **Statement by the Archbishop Desmond Tutu Leadership Fellows on the unrest in Zimbabwe**

**17<sup>th</sup> January 2019**

The Archbishop Desmond Tutu Leadership Fellows (“Tutu Fellows”), of the African Leadership Institute, are a diverse group of civic, political and business leaders from 40 African countries who are concerned with the governance and development of the African continent. We, the Tutu Fellows, are alarmed by the growing unrest in Zimbabwe and, most worryingly, by the Zimbabwean Government’s reaction to it. The unrest by ordinary citizens of Zimbabwe is in response to a hike in the fuel price in Zimbabwe which is now the most expensive in the region. A high cost of living, unpredictable food and fuel prices coupled with media censorship have understandably driven Zimbabweans to the edge. Citizens are also expressing discontent with unmet expectations following renewed hope for the nation after the July 2018 general elections and the failure of the Zimbabwean Government to address their most basic needs. We have witnessed the widespread looting across the country by citizens trying to access basic commodities in a bid to survive. Whilst we strongly condemn the looting, we find it extremely telling of how dire the economic situation is in Zimbabwe.

Civic leaders in Zimbabwe have called for peaceful protests by citizens by urging them to stay away from work and remain non-violent. Unfortunately, the situation has turned violent. We have seen the targeting of individuals perceived to be promoting these protests. Some individuals have been arrested, physically injured and even killed. The internet and social media shut down has had the inevitable effect of stifling freedom of expression and the dissemination of information within and across the country’s borders.

Tutu Fellows ascribe to the values of peace, tolerance and equality. We unreservedly condemn the actions by the government which undermine not only the peace and stability of the country but also the credibility of its government and its commitment to upholding human rights and the rule of law. Any meaningful way forward should always be for the people, by the people and of the people in line with the tenets of democracy.

We call upon the Zimbabwean government to release all civic leaders and activists who have been arrested and detained over the protests. The duty to de-escalate the tensions rests in the hands of the Government. We urge restraint by the Zimbabwean government in the handling of the situation and the treatment of Zimbabwean citizens. We also call upon the African Union to closely monitor the developments in Zimbabwe and make decisive interventions to ensure the respect for human rights and the rule of law within the mandate of its Charter. The Tutu Fellows stand in solidarity with the people of Zimbabwe as they look forward to creating a better Zimbabwe for them and their children.

**ARCHBISHOP DESMOND TUTU LEADERSHIP FELLOWS**