

OPEN LETTER TO PARLIAMENT

The Speaker of Parliament
Hon. Jacob Mudenda
Parliament of Zimbabwe
P.O. Box 298, Causeway,
Harare

Cc: Clerk of Parliament

30 April 2020

RE: URGENT CALL TO RECONVENE OF PARLIAMENT

We write calling for the urgent reconvening of Parliament.

Parliament as an institution, one that sits at the very centre of our constitutional democracy, has the responsibility to hold the Executive to account at all times. We are concerned by Parliament's decision to go on recess when the nation is gripped by the Covid-19 pandemic. Our MPs should be at the forefront of interrogating government's Covid-19 strategy, questioning budget allocations and ensuring there are adequate social safety nets for the poor and working class. Our MPs should be advocating for our frontline workers, protecting the lives of the many and ensuring this crisis does not benefit the few. We therefore call upon the Honourable Speaker to reconvene the House. We note that it may be impossible for Parliament to reconvene in Harare as this would require members to travel from all parts of the country and undermine efforts for social distancing as well as exposing themselves and their family members and therefore suggest considering other modalities of operation.

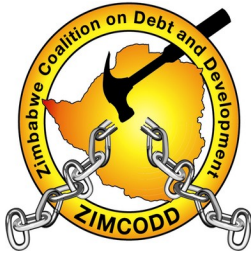
At the very least those committees that oversee government departments and organs of state that are in the front line of tackling the pandemic should be meeting – these include Committee on Standing Rules and Orders (CSRO), Budget, Finance and Economic Development Committees, Health, Child Welfare and Community Development Committee, among other key selected thematic committees. Parliament should urgently establish a special Covid-19 Ad Hoc Committee to oversee government during this crisis period. The Adhoc committee can be comprised of Chairpersons of all thematic and Portfolio committees. Committees can consult from members of the public on electronic platforms, and either livestream their virtual meetings or make available videos of the meetings afterwards. The world over is adjusting to new methods of working, so too should our Parliament. These committees could hold meetings using various video-conferencing tools that are available and get key government officials to interact with the committees via these platforms. They would be able to hold government to account for the actions they have taken, and ensure that these are consistent with the Constitution and the relevant legislation. The organisations applaud the foresight of providing our honourable Members of Parliament with tablets and it is our considered view that these gadgets should be put to efficient use now as the nation battles with the Covid-19 crisis to allow the continued functioning of Parliament.

There are many other interventions that Parliament could utilise and it can learn from neighbouring countries to ensure that it does not negate its constitutional mandate of representation, law making and oversight. In this vein, we also call upon relevant authorities to classify all Members of Parliament as essential service providers and remove their movement restrictions to enable them to conduct their constitutional duties. What Members of Parliament cannot afford, and be allowed to do, is fold their arms and allow government to rule by Executive decree without any oversight. Trust in institutions of governance is perhaps more important now than ever before.

We thank you for considering this urgent matter.

This joint letter is respectfully submitted by:

Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development (ZIMCODD), Magamba Network & OpenParlyZW



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