



31 March 2010

### **Open letter to the principals in the GNU**

We the undersigned individuals and organisations committed to the development of a positive rights discourse in Zimbabwe, are very concerned at recent statements made as part of International Women's Day celebrations in Chitungwiza, where the theme was "**Equal Rights, Equal Opportunities: Progress for All.**"

The statements, which make reference to attempts to include gay rights in the Constitution, undermine public tolerance and acceptance of diversity. Issues of sexuality impact on the dignity, privacy, identity and freedom of people. We urge you not to undermine the dignity of these individuals by making such homophobic statements.

We call on the principals to desist from making statements likely to promote hate and prejudice. Zimbabwe is going through a transition from a period characterised by hate, violence and economic suffering and moving towards national healing.

As Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai said in his weekly newsletter today:

*There can be no place in the new Zimbabwe for hate speech or the persecution of any sector of our population based on race, gender, tribe, culture, sexual orientation or political affiliation. All of us are entitled to our own opinions on certain values and beliefs, but in order to move our nation forward and achieve national reconciliation and healing, we have to uphold and foster the fundamental principle of tolerance, including tolerance of people that have chosen to live, believe and vote differently from ourselves. For too long, many of you, my fellow Zimbabweans, have not had the freedom of choice. Our new constitution shall be the cornerstone of a new society that embraces this particular freedom of choice and tolerance of both majority and minority views.*

We support a Constitution that protects Zimbabweans against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, just as it prevents discrimination on grounds such as race, gender, ethnicity, or religion.

The immediate challenge the nation is facing is overcoming social deprivations in areas such as hunger, health, education, unemployment and violence against women and children and above all the functionality of the GNU. These are the areas in which the Principals in the GNU should be providing leadership; rather than fostering antipathy and intolerance.

Sincerely