Youth’s Position on the Proposed Reintroduction of National Youth Training Programme (Youth Service) (April 2010)

Acknowledging the history of Zimbabwe in the pre and post independent era and the role young people played and continue to play in the shaping of the social, economic and political discourse of the country

Concerned by the continued marginalization of the youth voice on issues directly affecting them even after the formation of the Inclusive Government.

Appreciating the efforts being put in place by the Inclusive Government informed by the letter and spirit of the Global Political Agreement (GPA), that it is desirable to ensure that National Youth Training Programme once known as National Youth Service is reintroduced.

Acknowledging Article 15 of the GPA on the National Youth Training Programme and that Zimbabwe is undergoing a transition and moving from crisis to solutions that require Zimbabweans' input to help the future of a very youth dominated nation.

Considering the role, form and nature of the previous National Youth Service which played a destructive role of polarizing communities, carried out unspeakable acts of violence and the militarization of the youth sector.

Concerned by the proposed reintroduction of the Programme without taking note of the impact of past similar initiative to assist the shaping of the rebranded National Youth Training Programme. The proposed programme deserves the input of youths and youth friendly stakeholders to determine its strategic direction so that it gets a vote of confidence from the society.

After deliberations around the country under the campaign theme “Nothing for us without us” that brought together youth formations and other critical stakeholders directly or indirectly affected by the proposed Programme and with the full knowledge of the work done by youths, other civic organizations, political parties, social movements and the church to ensure that Zimbabwe will not find herself in a state of a militarized youth sector. Together and with an understanding that our struggle for youth participation and genuine representation is an ongoing vanguard role of young people and youth based organizations, we hereby give the following recommendations and positions on the proposed reintroduction of the National Youth Training Programme in Zimbabwe.

1. According to article 15.1(a) of the GPA “all youths regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, religion and political affiliation are eligible to participate in the national youth training programme”. This section provides for voluntary participation of young people in the programme, but contradicts with the proposed National
Youth Service Policy which targets in-school youths from pre-school to tertiary colleges and universities together with those out of school such as the unemployed, self employed or those in difficult circumstances and those in conflict with the law either serving sentences in prisons or serving under community service or leaving correctional centres. Given the economic situation, an almost nonexistent job creation environment and the target categories of youth, as young people we are of the view that this programme should be voluntary.

2. According to the GPA, young people are supposed to be trained at national youth training centres to which as young people we realize that given the nature of the target grouping of youths and state of the Zimbabwean economy, these centres cannot facilitate a conducive youth friendly environment for full participation especially of young women. As young people we call upon the National Youth Training Programme to be run under the two ministries of education, given that these ministries already have infrastructure, capacity to design and are already delivering most of the components in the proposed curriculum and offer facilities that are gender sensitive and enhance a culture of learning unlike the military style designed institutions such as the Border Gezi Training Centre in Mt Darwin.

3. Noting this, Youths advocate for an Independent National Youth Service Commission to be put in place after the amendment of the National Youth Policy. This commission and not the Interministerial Committee should be responsible for the formulation of the National Youth Service Policy and facilitate the delivery of the curriculum which had previously been delivered under high secrecy. If the programme has to be done outside the formal education system, professional experts are supposed to be identified by the commission to design and deliver the publicly accepted curriculum with input coming from young people and other stakeholders.

4. According to the report given to parliament by the Deputy Minister of Youth, Indigenization and Economic Empowerment, 80 000 young people graduated from the national Youth Service between 2001 and 2007. The centres were officially closed in 2007 when the state could not sustain the programme though there are still pockets of activity. As young people this is a shocking figure thus, we are calling upon for a transparent audit and evaluation of the previous activities of the National Youth Service and the current location of these graduates. It is alleged that some of them are now in the civil service whilst some are employed dubiously as youth officers in different constituencies carrying out partisan work. The audit coupled with environmental assessment should determine whether Zimbabwe is prepared to have this programme from a political point of view given that the National Healing and Reconciliation programme is turning out to be difficult to get underway. Socially, this programme needs a vote of confidence from parents and youths themselves given the magnitude of alleged abuse, the so-called recruits and Zimbabweans in general suffered under
the militarized programme. Economically, can the national budget sustain this programme given more urgent issues faced by the Inclusive Government such as constitutional reform, social service delivery and economic growth based on a productive and not consumptive economy? The youth of Zimbabwe also call for the rehabilitation through psycho-social support of the abused and neglected youths especially after the violent elections of 2002, 2005 and 2008.

5. As young people of Zimbabwe whilst acknowledging the need of a non-partisan National youth service or Training programme, we are calling upon the government of Zimbabwe to carry out a public enquiry, consultations and give feedback from the case studies carried out in Rwanda and Tanzania amongst the other African countries visited by the government before the drafting of any policy or curriculum for this programme. The policy should comply with the standards of the International Association of National Youth Service for best practice.

6. Whilst noting from the GPA that implementing the National Youth Training Programme remains a “... desirability... to the development of Zimbabwe”, we are advocating for the government to put in place a programme that is based on a shared national vision and being national in character. It should be premised on demand approach and not a supply approach of graduates into the economy that cannot offer any platform that can absorb them.

7. We are thus calling for the government to temporarily postpone the reintroduction of the National Youth Service programme and instead utilize the transition period to put in place all mechanisms and frameworks to ensure that the programme does not carry the negative perception from the past. As young people we have learnt from other national processes currently underway and we understand that such a sensitive programme cannot be effectively implemented by this fragile coalition government but only after a decisive free and fair election.

In Conclusion, the government has to identify what the young people need, through consultations and offer it and not what the state thinks the youth need and force it on young people. A conducive environment of tolerance, non-violence, democracy, rule of law and respect of human rights, and not just training should be created first by the state to breed a natural sense of patriotism and a culture of service not only amongst young people, but to everyone.

**Participating Organizations**

Achieve Your Goal Trust (AYGT), Build A Better Youth Zimbabwe (BABY ZIM); Bulawayo Agenda, Catholic Commission for Justice & Peace in Zimbabwe (CCJPZ), Christian Care, Christian Alliance, Christian Youth in Business (CYB), Combined Harare Residents Association (CHRA), Concerned Youth, Crisis Coalition in Zimbabwe, FACT Mutare, General Agriculture & Plantation Workers Union of Zimbabwe (GAPWUZ),
Habakkuk Trust, Intcha Group, Masvingo Residents & Ratepayers Association, Mavambo Kusile Dawn, MDC (M), MDC (T), Mutare Residents & Ratepayers Association, NANGO, National Youth Development Trust, Padare Men’s Forum on Gender, Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ), Radio Dialogue, Savanna Trust, Simukai Child Protection Programme, Southern African Parliamentary Support Trust (SAPST), Sports Africa Trust (SAT), Students and Youth Working on Reproductive Health Team (SAYWHAT), Students Christian Movement in Zimbabwe (SCMZ), Students Solidarity Trust (SST), Transparency International Zimbabwe (TIZ), United Youth Network for Peace & Development (UYNFPD), Women In Politics Support Unit (WIPSU), YEST Mutare, Young Voices Network (YVN), Youth Agenda Trust (YAT), Youth Alliance for Democracy (YAD), Youth Chat, Youth Empowerment & Transformation (YET), Youth Initiative for Democracy in Zimbabwe (YIDEZ), Youth Unlimited, Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR), Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU), Zimbabwe Poets for Human Rights (ZPHR), Zimbabwe Youth Network, Zimrights

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