1 February, 2019

# Senator the Hon Marise Payne

Minister for Foreign Affairs

# E-mail: foreign.minister@dfat.gov.au

CC: Sen. Penny Wong: senator.wong@aph.gov.au

Australian Embassy in Harare zimbabwe.embassy@dfat.gov.au

Dear Minister Payne,

I have been following with great concern the alarming and dangerous situation faced by protesting workers, including leaders and members of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU). This violence and repression appears to be in retaliation for taking protest action against steep fuel prices that have worsened an already unbearable high cost of living in the country. Zimbabwe’s workers are not getting rightful wages. The ZCTU called for a peaceful three-day ‘Stay Away’ from 14 to 16 January 2019 demanding an end to the economic crisis faced by the country and a reversal of the over 200% increase in fuel prices announced by your government.

Police and security forces violently attacked protesters by opening fire, injuring many, with reports of eight dead, many injured and over 600 now reported arrested. There has been reports of heavy military and police presence on the streets and security forces arbitrarily assaulting citizens, including by entering homes to drag out and beat people in an effort to instil fear and to clampdown on dissent. Women in Zimbabwe are mobilising to protest the many rapes perpetrated by the military and police. Furthermore, cell and land-line communications, the internet and social media were repeatedly blocked for days to prevent access to information and communication.

ZCTU General Secretary Japhet Moyo was arrested at the airport upon his return from abroad. He was processed at the Central Police station with a charge of subverting a constitutionally elected government. ZCTU President Peter Mutasa has been arrested on charges of inciting violence and treason. Previously, his house was raided by police forces and his brother severely beaten.

Workers have the right to express their views on the government’s economic programs, including through demonstrations in an atmosphere free of fear, intimidation, coercion, repression and violence. I reiterate that the ZCTU had initiated a peaceful action for three days calling on people to stay away from work and to refrain from any violent conduct.

I ask that the Australian Ambassador consult with ZCTU and civil society leaders about the current situation and dangers facing them. I urge the Australian government to make representations to the Zimbabwean President to restore a social climate that is free of violence and fear, to guarantee the safety of all protesters and to immediately and unconditionally release those arrested, including ZCTU General Secretary Japhet Moyo and President Peter Mutasa, and other democratic civil society leaders. Charges against those who have done nothing other than exercise their right to peaceful assembly and association should immediately be dropped.

The Australian government should join calls for an independent judicial inquiry into the excessive violence against protesters and civil society organisations, in order to provide justice and prevent the repetition of such actions. Australia should call on the Zimbabwe government to, as a matter of urgency, engage in good faith negotiations with the ZCTU leadership to agree on a peaceful and constructive way out of the current economic crisis with full respect for human and workers’ rights.

Yours sincerely,

[NAME]

[TITLE] \*optional

[ORGANISATION NAME] \*optional