

## **Hillary Musarurwa: Rising Fees and the Right to Protest in Zimbabwe**

**“Zimbabwe: The land where students, and not fees, fall”.**

I have always argued that Zimbabwe is in a state of negative peace, punctuated by a series of state perpetrated structural violence against its citizens (Musarurwa 2016; Musarurwa and Kaye 2016). It therefore did not come as a surprise when this type of violence was shown against 600 medical students from the University of Zimbabwe on 26 June 2017. The students were told about an increase in fees in the accustomed “take it or leave it” style. When they voiced out their concerns and approached the university authorities for redress, the reaction was as always expected – repressive. They were immediately chucked out of all halls of residences on the guise that they had engaged in violent protests. Thankfully, the courts reversed this and the students were back in residence within a few days. However, the issue an unjustified fee increase in a sub 10% inflation economy has not been addressed yet. This incident is not isolated. In fact, it is reflective of the nature of tertiary education in Zimbabwe. Where structural and cultural violence against students is rampant and the students suffer in silence. Many have been forced to drop out of their studies because they cannot afford the fees. In the absence of a reliable and transparent scholarship or bursary program students from poor households endure the most of social injustice and exclusion.

Amidst all this gloom, it is warming to note that the students are exercising their rights and are speaking out. However, they must tread carefully given the oppressive nature of the Zimbabwean institution and their hard-handed response to students’ protests regardless of how peaceful they may be. Going forward students organisers need to ensure that they apply all non-violent strategies at their disposal. Because as highlighted by Musarurwa *et al.* (2016), in a state where human rights are trampled upon and police brutality is the only form of policing known, non-violent action has to be the order of the day for the citizens. The students need to continue seeking protection from the courts. The support received thus far from the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Right is commendable. There is need to pressure the University of Zimbabwe to explain the justification of its abrupt fee increase and possibly reverse this increase. Other forms of non-violent action that can be adopted can include direct engagements with the institution’s authorities, if at all they will agree to sit down with the students. Permission for peaceful demonstrations need to be sought from the police. The tricky part will be ensuring that these remain peaceful given the high levels of infiltration within student structures. All the same it is worth trying. When all else fails a boycott of the new fees payment can be an option. It is also now that solidarity from well-wishers can be given. The student body can also seek for corporate sponsorship to ensure that students continue with their studies.

### **References:**

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