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### COI QUERY RESPONSE

#### ZIMBABWE – INFORMATION ON THE PREVALENCE OF FORCED MARRIAGE INFORMATION ON THE PREVALENCE OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

In May 2024 *B-Metro* mentioned that: “In a case highlighting the continued prevalence of forced child marriages, in Zimbabwe especially in rural areas, a 46-year-old man from Empandeni East Village under Chief Tshitshi in Mangwe, Matabeleland South Province, has been arrested for allegedly marrying off his 18-year-old daughter for cash.”<sup>1</sup>

The *US Department of State* Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in April 2024 reported that: “Despite legal prohibitions, some rural families and religious groups continued to force girls to marry. High rates of unemployment, the prevalence of girls dropping out of school, and the inability of families to earn a stable income were major causes of child marriage. Child marriages were common, with 34 percent of girls married before reaching age 18.”<sup>2</sup>

In February 2024 the *World Bank Zim March 2024* states that: “Child marriages are more prevalent in rural areas compared to urban areas. In 2022, of those females ages 20-24 years who married before 18 years, 22.7 percent were in rural areas and 7.2 percent were in urban areas. Harmful norms, traditional and religious beliefs and practices and poverty have contributed to high percentage of child marriages, particularly in rural areas. Consultations with communities revealed that some of the marriages are forced; in some religious sects, young girls are pledged to older men by their parents who promote the practice clandestinely.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> B-Metro (6 May 2024) Man marries off daughter for R3 700

<sup>2</sup> US Department of State (22 April 2024) 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Zimbabwe

<sup>3</sup> World Bank Zim March 2024 (27 February 2024) Zimbabwe Gender Based Violence Assessment - Scope, Programming, Gaps and Entry Points, p.19

*The Herald (Zimbabwe)* in January 2024 notes that: “There has been debate in Zimbabwe over the whole matter of age of marriage and age of consent. In 2013 a substantial majority of the people, as had been expressed in the consultative process over many months, thought that the minimum age of marriage should be 18. This was first of all to ensure that a person entering marriage had a reasonable level of maturity, but secondly tying the minimum age to the age of majority stressed that the only people who could agree to a marriage were the adult couple involved. Other people could support or hinder the couple, but they could not force a marriage and they could not block a marriage. A major area of pressure for this minimum marriage age came from the realisation that there had been a lot of forced marriage in Zimbabwe, and far too many underage girls were being forced into marriage.”<sup>4</sup>

*The Manica Post* in December 2023 reported that: “... the national launch was held in Manicaland as child forced marriages, which are one of the key drivers of GBV, are prevalent in the province.”<sup>5</sup>

The *Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Government of Zimbabwe)* in December 2023 mentioned that: “Consultations with communities during the development of the GBV strategy identified prevalent harmful practices that often lead to GBV. Child marriages are highly prevalent (33.7 percent) in Zimbabwe despite the existence of a legal framework that outlaws marriage for people under the age of 18 years. Consultations with communities revealed that some of the marriages are forced, as young girls are pledged to older men by their parents in some religious sects which promote the practice clandestinely.”<sup>6</sup>

The *New Zimbabwe* in October 2023 reported that: “Chipo's family lives in Mashonaland East's Chihota area where deep levels of poverty have seen young girls being forced into early marriages or falling prey to men who use financial muscle to lure them into sexual relationships.”<sup>7</sup>

In June 2023 the *Chronicle* points out that: “Clr Jack said forced marriages are still prevalent.”<sup>8</sup>

## INFORMATION ON THE PREVALENCE OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The *World Bank* in April 2024 mentioned that: “In Zimbabwe, gender-based violence (GBV) is a significant concern, with a substantial number of women experiencing physical and sexual violence. Approximately 39.4% of women have been subjected to physical violence, and an estimated 11.6% have faced sexual violence. Although there has been a decline in child marriage rates, 16.2% of women were married before the age of 18 as of 2022.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The Herald (Zimbabwe) (15 January 2024) Editorial Comment: Age of consent law offers high-level protection

<sup>5</sup> The Manica Post (31 December 2023) EDITORIAL COMMENT: Ending GBV to achieve Vision 2030

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Government of Zimbabwe) (15 December 2023) Zimbabwe National Strategy to Prevent and Address Gender Based Violence 2023-2030 [Executive Summary; 1. Introduction; 2. Situation Analysis], p.19

<sup>7</sup> New Zimbabwe (8 October 2023) Sexual exploitation ruins lives of young girls from poor Chihota families

<sup>8</sup> Chronicle (23 June 2023) 41 pregnancy drop-outs since January in Kwekwe

<sup>9</sup> World Bank (29 April 2024) Persistent Gender Disparities Hinder Women's Safety and Productivity in Zimbabwe

The *Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA)* in April 2024 states that: “Sexual harassment and other abuses of female journalists are reportedly high, but this is an area that needs more research.”<sup>10</sup>

The *US Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC)* in April 2024 reported that: “The law criminalizes sexual offenses, including rape and spousal rape, with conviction punishable by lengthy prison sentences. Nonetheless, rape remains widespread, sentences are inconsistent, and victims are not consistently afforded protection in court.”<sup>11</sup> This report further mentioned that: “Domestic violence remains a serious problem, especially intimate partner violence perpetrated by men against women.”<sup>12</sup>

The *Global Voices* in April 2024 points out that: “In Zimbabwe, gender-based violence (GBV), which encompasses three main categories— intimate partner violence (IPV), sexual abuse, and child marriage — remains a silent epidemic, particularly affecting married women. According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), approximately 1 in 3 women in Zimbabwe aged 15 to 49 have experienced physical violence, while 1 in 4 have faced sexual violence since adolescence. The statistics indicate that GBV cases in Zimbabwe have been on the rise; 5,717 and 8,069 rape cases were reported in 2013 and 2016, respectively. ZimStat reports revealed that more than 8,907 cases of domestic abuse were recorded across the country between January and December 2023.”<sup>13</sup>

The *US Department of State Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* in April 2024 notes that: “While the law criminalized sexual offenses, including rape and spousal rape of women, these crimes remained widespread. The 2019 *Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey* conducted by the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency reported nearly 40 percent of never-married adolescent girls and women ages 15-49 had experienced physical or sexual violence by their existing or former partners. The 2020 *SADC Gender Protocol Barometer* reported 68 percent of women in the country experienced gender-based violence from partners or caregivers over their lifetime.”<sup>14</sup>

A report issued by the *World Bank Zim March 2024* in February 2024 states that: “In 2019, around 42.5 percent of women experienced physical and/or sexual violence – similar to the 43.4 rate reported in 2011 – and higher than the global and regional averages of 27 percent and 33 percent respectively. Nationally representative household surveys consistently point to a high, relatively unchanged, prevalence of physical GBV. Prevalence of violence against children (VAC) is also high, and above the estimates of several countries in SSA: with 32.5 percent of females ages 18-24 years ever experiencing it before the age of 18. Other forms of GBV include child marriage, with 33.7 percent of women marrying before age 18, and 5.4 percent before age 15. Over 90 percent of women experience sexual harassment at work.”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) (29 April 2024) The State of Press Freedom in Southern Africa 2023 [Zimbabwe excerpt], p.8

<sup>11</sup> US Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) (26 April 2024) Zimbabwe Country Security Report 2024

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*

<sup>13</sup> Global Voices (23 April 2024) Behind every purple door in this Zimbabwean community, is a safe haven for victims of gender-based violence, p.2

<sup>14</sup> US Department of State (22 April 2024) 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Zimbabwe

<sup>15</sup> World Bank Zim March 2024 (27 February 2024) Zimbabwe Gender Based Violence Assessment - Scope, Programming, Gaps and Entry Points

In December 2023 the *Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Government of Zimbabwe)* reported that: “Despite having a progressive legal and policy framework and concerted efforts of government, development partners, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and communities, the prevalence of Gender Based Violence (GBV) in Zimbabwe remains unacceptably high. The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS 2019) shows that close to 40 percent of women and girls in Zimbabwe experience physical violence in their lifetime and 12 percent experience sexual violence. Prevalence of physical GBV among women and girls in Zimbabwe is 10 percent higher than the average global prevalence rate of 30%. The 2017 Zimbabwe Young Adult Survey, a Violence Against Children Survey (VACS), shows that about one in ten females ages 18–24 experienced sexual violence during childhood, and the prevalence of overall childhood sexual violence is significantly higher for females (9.1 percent) compared with males (1.1 percent).”<sup>16</sup>

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