

ZIMBABWE HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANISATION

Position Paper — June 2026

A Seat at the Wrong Table:

Zimbabwe’s Election to the UN Security Council and the Crisis of Institutional Accountability

Prepared by the Zimbabwe Human Rights Organisation (ZHRO)

With particular acknowledgement to Shorayi Spencer Guzha, whose analysis first identified the central contradiction examined in this paper.

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Executive Summary

On 3 June 2026, the United Nations General Assembly elected Zimbabwe to a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council, to serve from January 2027. Zimbabwe ran unopposed, backed by the African Union, and received 182 of 191 votes cast.

ZHRO records this election with grave concern. Zimbabwe’s governing ZANU-PF party has, across 45 years of unbroken rule, maintained systematic practices of political violence, enforced disappearance, torture, judicial weaponisation, and the suppression of all meaningful civil and political life. These are not allegations. They are documented findings.

This position paper sets out the factual record, examines the structural failures that permitted this election, and calls on parliamentarians, civil society, and the media to treat Zimbabwe’s Security Council tenure not as a mandate, but as a challenge to account.

With particular acknowledgement to Shorayi Spencer Guzha, ZHRO member, whose essay ‘Beyond Zimbabwe’s Borders: The Human Cost of Governance Failures’ first articulated the central contradiction this paper examines.

1. The Facts of the Election

Date of election	3 June 2026, UN General Assembly, New York
Term	2 years — 1 January 2027 to 31 December 2028
Votes received	182 of 191 cast (two-thirds majority required)
Opposition	None — Zimbabwe ran as the sole African Group candidate
AU endorsement	Full and uncontested African Union backing
Previous terms	Zimbabwe previously served in 1983–84 and 1991–92
Replacing	Somalia (term ending December 2026)

The absence of opposition is itself significant. No African Union member state raised the question of Zimbabwe’s domestic human rights record as a criterion for candidacy. The election proceeded as a procedural formality — regional bloc solidarity substituting for accountability, and 182 national delegations lending their authority to a government whose treatment of its own people is among the most extensively documented failures of governance on the African continent.

2. The Documented Record: What ZHRO Knows

ZHRO does not make general accusations. The following summary reflects documented evidence gathered by ZHRO's researcher network, corroborated by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, and Zimbabwe's own civic organisations including ZimRights.

Political violence and enforced disappearances

ZANU-PF has maintained its hold on power through systematic violence against political opponents, civic activists, journalists, trade unionists, and religious leaders. In 2024 alone, ZimRights documented 274 human rights violations across all ten of Zimbabwe's provinces, affecting 8,279 individuals, with ZANU-PF members identified as the leading perpetrators. Human Rights Watch recorded over 160 arrests in 2024 of individuals including elected officials, religious leaders, and students, on charges designed to suppress dissent rather than address genuine criminality.

Judicial weaponisation

The criminal justice system has been systematically deployed as an instrument of political control. Cases are brought against opposition figures on fabricated or grossly disproportionate charges, held open for months or years to maintain the accused in a state of legal jeopardy and economic ruin, and ultimately resolved — as in the recent case of Baba veShanduko, noted by Shorayi Spencer Guzha — by acquittals that arrive too late to undo the damage. The process is the punishment. This is not justice. It is state-sponsored harassment operating under judicial cover.

Suppression of civil society and media

Independent journalism in Zimbabwe operates under conditions of continuous threat. Journalists face arrest, equipment seizure, physical assault, and the constant possibility of prosecution under laws specifically designed to criminalise reporting that is unflattering to the regime. Civil society organisations face registration barriers, funding restrictions, and the ever-present risk that association with international human rights bodies will be reframed by the government as evidence of foreign-sponsored subversion.

Transnational repression

The reach of ZANU-PF's intimidation apparatus does not stop at Zimbabwe's borders. ZHRO has documented, in the United Kingdom and elsewhere, the activities of Zimbabwe's Central Intelligence Organisation and its proxies within the diaspora community. Tactics include surveillance of activists, threats transmitted through community intermediaries, disinformation campaigns designed to discredit diaspora human rights voices, and the use of the Zimbabwe Embassy in London as a coordination point for pressure against exile critics. This is transnational repression — a category of human rights violation that UK authorities have been too slow to treat with the seriousness it demands.

Economic coercion and the migration crisis

The consequence of 45 years of ZANU-PF governance is an economy in which unemployment has, at various points, exceeded 80%, in which the healthcare system has effectively collapsed, in which basic infrastructure — roads, water, electricity — is in advanced decay, and in which access to economic opportunity has been systematically directed toward regime loyalists at the expense of the broader population. The inevitable result has been one of the largest sustained emigration events in sub-Saharan African history. Millions of Zimbabweans — the country's most capable,

most educated, most entrepreneurial people — have been driven across the Limpopo River into South Africa.

As Shorayi Spencer Guzha observed with precision: those who fled economic devastation and political persecution at home have encountered a different form of insecurity abroad. Recent anti-immigrant violence in South Africa has targeted Zimbabwean migrants with particular ferocity — attacks, displacement, intimidation, and deaths. The government whose governance failures drove the migration will now occupy a seat on the body charged with addressing global displacement and insecurity. The contradiction could not be more complete.

Zimbabwe’s citizens experience insecurity not in distant conflict zones but in their daily struggle for economic survival, political expression, and personal safety — whether at home or abroad. — Shorayi Spencer Guzha, ZHRO

3. How This Happened: The Structural Failure

Zimbabwe’s election to the Security Council is not an aberration. It is the logical output of a multilateral system whose design has been progressively captured by forces antithetical to its founding purposes. ZHRO identifies four mechanisms:

- Bloc voting without accountability criteria. The African Union endorsed Zimbabwe without requiring any assessment of its domestic human rights record. Regional solidarity — a legitimate value in many contexts — has been weaponised to insulate member state governments from international scrutiny.
- Universal membership without enforceable standards. The UN system grants membership as a right, not a privilege earned by adherence to Charter principles. There is no mechanism by which a state’s consistent violation of those principles results in the loss of participation rights, let alone Security Council candidacy.
- Institutional self-preservation over honest assessment. The UN system has learned, through decades of experience, that holding powerful regional blocs to account threatens institutional cohesion, funding streams, and the careers of senior officials. Honest assessment is structurally disincentivised.
- The legitimisation effect. Governments with authoritarian records actively seek international institutional positions precisely because those positions confer legitimacy. Mnangagwa’s government has already described the Security Council election as international endorsement of Zimbabwe. That framing will be used domestically to delegitimise opposition and internationally to deflect human rights pressure.

4. The Diplomatic Opportunity

ZHRO recognises that Zimbabwe’s Security Council membership, however problematic its origins, creates specific opportunities that civil society and democratic governments should be prepared to use.

Scrutiny at every turn

Every statement Zimbabwe makes in the Security Council on issues of displacement, conflict, political violence, or human rights must be assessed against its domestic record. ZHRO will

maintain a running commentary, available to parliamentarians, journalists, and diplomatic missions, documenting the gap between Zimbabwe's Security Council rhetoric and its domestic practice.

Parliamentary pressure in the UK

The United Kingdom maintains both a permanent Security Council seat and a sanctions regime against senior Zimbabwean officials. Those two facts create a specific responsibility. UK Ministers and Members of Parliament should be asked, at every appropriate opportunity, how they intend to respond when Zimbabwe speaks on human rights issues in the chamber where the UK also sits. Lord Oates and other parliamentarians with established records on Zimbabwe accountability should be briefed and supported.

Engaging the incoming term

Zimbabwe's two-year term begins January 2027. There is time — from now until then — to build an international coalition of civil society organisations, diaspora groups, academic institutions, and sympathetic governments that will ensure Zimbabwe's Security Council record is scrutinised in real time. ZHRO invites organisations across the diaspora and in Zimbabwe to join that coalition.

The counter-brief

When Zimbabwe speaks of peace and security in New York, the counter-brief must be ready: the names of the disappeared, the testimony of the tortured, the documented record of 45 years of systematic oppression, and the voices of the millions driven into exile. That counter-brief is what ZHRO exists to compile and to present.

5. Calls to Action

ZHRO calls upon the following to act:

The UK Government

To clarify, publicly and in writing, how its Security Council voting record and its Zimbabwe sanctions policy will be coordinated during Zimbabwe's 2027–2028 tenure. To instruct the UK Mission in New York to raise Zimbabwe's domestic human rights record whenever relevant in Security Council proceedings. To strengthen enforcement of existing sanctions and resist any pressure — including pressure arising from economic interests in Zimbabwe's lithium sector — to dilute that regime.

Members of Parliament and the House of Lords

To table written and oral questions to Ministers on UK-Zimbabwe policy. To request a debate on Zimbabwe's Security Council membership and its implications for UK foreign policy. To meet with ZHRO and ZHRO member representatives to receive a full briefing on the documented human rights situation.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

To ensure that Zimbabwe's Security Council membership does not result in reduced scrutiny of its domestic human rights record. To maintain and strengthen the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur mechanisms relevant to Zimbabwe. To provide a formal assessment of the consistency

between Zimbabwe's Security Council role and its obligations under the international human rights treaties to which it is a signatory.

Civil society and diaspora organisations globally

To join ZHRO's coordinated monitoring of Zimbabwe's Security Council tenure. To share documentation, testimony, and evidence with ZHRO's research network. To amplify the counter-brief in every forum available.

The media

To report on Zimbabwe's Security Council statements not in isolation, but in the context of its domestic record. To seek comment from ZHRO, from Zimbabwean diaspora voices, and from those directly affected by the regime's governance failures, when covering any statement made by Zimbabwe in its new Security Council capacity.

Conclusion

Shorayi Spencer Guzha wrote that Zimbabwe's Security Council membership should be viewed not only as a diplomatic achievement but as a call for reflection. ZHRO endorses that framing entirely, and adds one word: action.

Genuine leadership in international affairs requires more than representation at the United Nations. It requires building a society in which citizens can flourish at home and are not compelled to seek dignity, opportunity, and security elsewhere. By that standard — the only standard that matters — Zimbabwe's government has no mandate to speak for international peace and security. It has 45 years of evidence to answer for first.

***Until those underlying challenges are addressed, Zimbabwe's place on the Security Council will remain a symbol of both national achievement and unresolved contradiction. —
Shorayi Spencer Guzha, ZHRO***

ZHRO will not allow that contradiction to be managed into silence. We will hold the counter-brief. We will present the evidence. We will ensure that every time Zimbabwe speaks in that chamber, the world has access to what its government does not want the world to hear.

About ZHRO

The Zimbabwe Human Rights Organisation (ZHRO) is a UK-based human rights organisation documenting and advocating against the systematic oppression of Zimbabwe's people by the ZANU-PF regime. ZHRO represents the democratic diaspora — Zimbabweans who have fled persecution and who are committed to a free, democratic Zimbabwe. Website: zhro.org.uk

This position paper is published in association with the Blue Horizon Foundation (bluehorizon.foundation) and draws on the broader analysis in the Foundation's flagship essay 'Institutions Without Integrity: How the World's Great Institutions Lost Their Moral Purpose' (June 2026).

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