

STATEMENT BY THE GOVERNMENT OF ZIMBABWE
DELIVERED BY THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC SERVICE, LABOUR AND SOCIAL
WELFARE,
HONOURABLE PROFESSOR PAUL MAVIMA
DURING THE HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT OF THE 112TH SESSION OF THE COUNCIL OF
THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION FOR MIGRATION

- Excellences;
- Honorable Ministers and Ambassadors
- Distinguished delegates;
- Ladies and gentlemen

On behalf of the Government of Zimbabwe, I would like to start by expressing my gratitude for the opportunity to contribute to the high-level discussion during this 112th session of the IOM Council.

The theme of this discussion which is “**the impact of COVID-19 on borders, migration, and mobility: learning lessons and preparing for the future**” is not only very relevant but also extremely important. The Government of Zimbabwe is therefore pleased to share its own experiences. We do so with a fervent hope that the outcomes of this high level discussion will contribute towards safe, orderly and regular migration. Ultimately, the aim is to achieve our national, continental and global developmental aspirations as espoused in the Sustainable Development Goals.

Chairperson, following the outbreak of Covid -19, several countries around the world resorted to lockdown restrictions in order to curb the spread of the virus. Migrant workers were significantly affected by the closure of businesses in their host countries. Zimbabwean nationals working in different countries especially in our neighboring countries were not spared. Most found themselves without a means for survival as they could not qualify for the social protection measures put in place by their host governments especially in the case of irregular migrants.

Naturally these desperate migrant workers had to return to their countries under very difficult circumstances. It is estimated that approximately over three hundred and ninety-four thousand (394 000) Zimbabwean migrants returned to Zimbabwe due to the impact of COVID-19 in their countries of destination. The situation of returning migrants was made even more difficult by the closure of borders as part of national lockdowns.

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, in order to ease the circumstances of our returning nationals and to uphold their rights, the Government of Zimbabwe established Reception and Support Centers at Beit-Bridge and Plumtree which are our border posts with South Africa and Botswana respectively and were our busiest ports of entry during this period. The Reception Centers provided COVID-19 testing, isolation and quarantine facilities, basic services and amenities, transport facilities as well as psycho-social support. In addition, the Government with support from its development partners such as the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) assisted with the re-integration of the

migrants where the returning migrants were given starter packages so that they could engage in sustainable livelihood projects in their communities of origin.

Chairperson, during the peak of the successive waves of the pandemic, the Government of Zimbabwe would declare highest level lockdown restrictions. During these periods returning migrants had to undergo a mandatory quarantine at the expense of the State. To this end, the Government through the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare established and managed quarantine centres countrywide. A total of **54** quarantine centres were established across the country. To date, almost **34, 000** people have passed through these quarantine centres where they were provided with the following:

- 1) Accommodation,
- 2) Bedding and linen,
- 3) Food and at times clothing for deportees
- 4) Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- 5) Medications
- 6) Sanitary wear, and
- 7) Transport from port of entry to quarantine centres and from quarantine centres to their homes upon discharge from quarantine centres at the end of the quarantine period.

Excellences, I am pleased to inform you that the Government of Zimbabwe has rolled out an ambitious Covid-19 vaccination programme which is free and non-discriminatory on the basis of nationality. To date almost 3 million people have been fully vaccinated including migrants. As you all appreciate vaccination is our greatest weapon in the fight against this pandemic.

Distinguished delegates, whilst functional mechanisms were put in place by the Government of Zimbabwe to assist returning migrants, more needs to be done to address some of the challenges faced by labour migrants during the COVID-19 period. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for closer cooperation between migrant-sending and migrant-receiving countries. Conclusion and implementation of Bilateral Labour Agreements for instance can go a long way in ensuring that the rights and welfare of labour migrants are upheld and protected. These agreements should incorporate issues related to the portability of social security benefits so that migrant workers are able to access social security benefits even in situations where they are forced by emergencies to return to their countries of origin.

Going into the future ladies and gentlemen, enhanced migration management and governance should be a priority at national, regional, continental and global levels. Disaster preparedness and response should be mainstreamed in the migration management discourse and practice. Platforms such as Pan African Forum on Migration (POFAM) and Migration Dialogue for Southern Africa (MIDSA) should be enhanced.

As I conclude, **distinguished delegates**, I would like to express my Government's profound gratitude for all the support that we have received and continue to receive from the International Organisation for Migration and other development partners during this difficult time. Let me restate our hope that this high level discussion will enhance our future work in this important area of migration.