

URGENT ACTION

CIVIL SOCIETY UNDER ATTACK WITH NEW DRAFT LAW

On March 1, Zimbabwe's government announced the Private Voluntary Organization (PVO) Amendment Bill 2024 to allegedly 'curb money-laundering and financing of terrorism and to ensure that Non-Governmental Organizations do not undertake political lobbying.' Following the President's refusal to sign the PVO Amendment Bill 2021 and the subsequent lapse of the original Bill in August 2023, there was hope that the President had considered the submissions made by Civil Society Organizations in 2023. However, the new bill reflects that most of the issues raised were not addressed and it still contains provisions which will negatively impact civic space and threaten the continued existence and operations of Civil Society Organizations.

TAKE ACTION:

- Write a letter in your own words or using the sample below as a guide to one or both government officials listed. You can also email, fax, call or Tweet them.
- [Click here](#) to let us know the actions you took on **Second Urgent Action 68.22**. It's important to report because we share the total number with the officials we are trying to persuade and the people we are trying to help.

Speaker of Parliament

Jacob Francis Nzwidamilimo Mudenda

Parliament of Zimbabwe

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Embassy of Zimbabwe in the United States

His Excellency Ambassador Tadeous T. Chifamba

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Washington DC 20009

Email: general@zimbassydc.org

Dear Hon. Jacob Francis Nzwidamilimo Mudenda,

I am concerned about the Private Voluntary Organization (PVO) Amendment Bill of 2024 and its implications to the work of **Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs)** and the rights to freedom of expression and association in Zimbabwe.

In November 2021, the authorities first announced the PVO Amendment Bill HB 10 of 2021. The government cited that the bill was to curb money-laundering and financing of terrorism and ensure that NGOs would not undertake political lobbying.

If signed into law, the 2024 PVO Amendment Bill would impose severe restrictions on the important work of civil society organizations in Zimbabwe. Currently, some provisions in the Bill give significant powers to the Minister and Registrar which could be used to interfere with the independence and operations of NGOs. The Bill must be dropped or amended to align with Zimbabwe's human rights obligations.

I urge you to conduct a genuine public consultation and to remove any clauses in the PVO Amendment Bill 2024 that undermines the rights to freedom of association, freedom of expression, and the work of civil society organizations. I also urge you to ensure that consideration within this process is given to the recommendations made by civil society organizations.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Zimbabwe was placed on Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) monitoring program in 2018 after gaps were noted in its policy and legal framework. In 2022 the country was removed from the FATF gray list; however, the government continues to push for the enactment of the PVO Amendment Bill.

On August 31, 2021, the Zimbabwe Government approved amendments to the Private Voluntary Amendment Act which were proposed by the Minister of Justice, Legal, and Parliamentary Affairs. The proposed changes to the Act were met with widespread skepticism based on the current national context and historical experiences. Overall, post-election disputes, a collapsing economy, and widespread economic hardships caused by poor economic policies and austerity measures have raised tensions in the country. NGOs have been falsely accused of meddling in political affairs and stirring the populace to vote against the ruling party.

The PVO Amendment Bill 2021 placed all civic organizations registered under different laws under one law and the clauses indicate an attempt to control and shut down civil society perceived to be 'anti-government.' The bill aimed to limit CSOs activities and infringe on their constitutionally guaranteed civil and political rights. The Bill contains vague provisions where supporting or opposing a political party or candidate is prohibited, but it is not clear what supporting or opposing a political party means. On April 11, 2022, civil society met with the Minister of Justice during a consultative meeting and the Minister addressed parliament agreeing to introduce various amendments. The proposed amendments which the Minister of Public Service, Labor and Social Welfare brought back to Parliament are more repressive than the first with provisions that introduced additional, excessively punitive, criminal, and civil penalties for noncomplying PVOs, as well as individual liability for trustees, employees, and managers of PVOs, and anyone involved in the control of a PVO, including members of the public.

In 2022, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) reached out to President Emmerson Mnangagwa and engaged him highlighting that the PVO Amendment Bill contained provisions which were not in line with international human rights standards and the Constitution and would hinder the work of CSOs. They further submitted that Zimbabwe has adequate regulatory regime which could be used to ensure that CSOs are not used to finance terrorism and money laundering.

In February 2023, PVO Amendment bill 2021 was passed by both the National Assembly and Senate and was submitted to the president for signing, however, the president did not sign and sent the bill back to parliament with reservations. In August, the PVO Amendment bill 2021 lapsed when parliament dissolved ahead of the 2023 elections. In October 2023, the PVO amendment was included in the list of bills when the president announced the legislative agenda. The PVO Amendment Bill 2024 was announced in March 2020. The new bill remains repressive and has not considered any concerns raised by CSOs or inputs from the public during the parliamentary public hearings for the previous PVO Amendment bill 2021.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English or your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: June 14, 2024

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr46/5880/2022/en/>