



Press Statement

Supplementary Budget is not necessary

31 May 2019, Harare- the Harare Residents Trust rejects the decision by the City of Harare to introduce a supplementary budget over inflationary pressures on the current budget. It has become apparent that the drive is not informed by reality but is motivated by the desire to stratify the demands of the increased work forces for a 100 per cent cost of living adjustment. The nearly 11 thousand workers of the council are any important component of the service delivery matrix. The rate payers are an equally important contributor to the effective and efficient functioning of the City of Harare and in all other local authorities. Introducing a supplementary budget at this stage of the implementation of the existing budget has the next effect of overturning the overall strategic planning, resources allocation, expenditure and performance management processes in the council. The other major reason to reject this proposed supplementary budget is the timing, given that we are already midway through the year, and from September to November there would be other budget making processes in preparation for the 2020 Budget.

The pronouncement by the council that they would be engaging ratepayers to hear their views on the issue of the proposed supplementary budget is in order as far as being inclusive and consultative. However, the process as currently constituted falls far short of ratepayers' expectations. Based on the experience and the practice in the City of Harare, the budget consultative meetings are a mere formality, with the content and the process of the budget making being determined by the bureaucrats, who themselves are interested parties. They overlook the valid inputs of ratepayers. The meetings are held in an atmosphere of time wasting, discussions are heavily manipulated, and this has consistently deprived the ratepayers of their right to be heard by their elected and appointed duty bearers. The citizens as rights holders, as receivers of the Council's services have a right to speak out their minds in a constructive and productive manner. Therefore as long as the supplementary budget consultations are held in the same manner the previous annual budget consultations have been held, the result will always be the same- a contested outcome. From practice, most of the Councillors do not have the capacity to chair meetings; neither do they have an appreciation of the process of deliberative democracy where discussions are held in order to reach general consensus and the public support of council policies. This means whatever we have generally agreed as the ideal budget should then be processed and approved, and ratepayers have no problem to support their responsive, transparent and accountable Council.

The HRT bases for rejecting the supplementary budget is galvanised by the reality on the ground that residents owe the council above 500 million dollars in unpaid rates. Industry, business and government departments and senior ruling and opposition political leaders owe a combat plus \$200 million dollars in unpaid rates and rentals. The City of Harare has a finance department whose major mandate is to collect revenues, follow up and recover outstanding debts and to assist and recommend to the council new ways of generating revenue for the council in order to minimise dependences on rate payers. Government departments and senior politicians have a track record of not settling their debts to the City of Harare. Most recently a writ of execution against Harvest

House, the headquarters of the MDC Alliance was not executed following the intervention of the Mayor and the Acting Chamber Secretary. The Mayor is currently the MDC Alliance Treasurer for Harare Province. His political party position should never be confused with his Mayoral duties. According to council records the MDC Alliance owes the City of Harare plus \$200 000 in unpaid rates. In order to gain the trust and confidences of all rate payers, the City of Harare should desist from pursuing debt influenced by partisan considerations. The rate payers must be convinced that their elected and appointed officials are transparently and accountably executing their legal mandates without compromising on the altar or political expedience.

Going forward on resolution of this matter of supplementary budget in view of huge amounts owed by ratepayers, government departments, business and industry, and senior politicians in both Zanu PF and the MDC Alliance, the Harare Residents' Trust requests the City of Harare to publish the full list of their top 1 000 debtors in Harare for the past two years. The failure to take more democratic processes to recover the outstanding debts is an indictment of the Finance Department and all its ancillary divisions which should be working with ratepayers to ensure that the council fully functions. The list should be able to reveal to us as concerned residents on the justification or un-justification of the introduction of the supplementary budget. There is need at this stage to prioritise more citizens' engagement to ensure that the full amounts owed are recovered, and a more vigorous plan to raise more revenue from other sources is put in place. The HRT commits itself to fully cooperating with the Council in their endeavour to raise more revenue in order to provide a better service than is currently being provided. There is need to discard the old ways of gathering information from communities and become more systematic to ensure that all key stakeholders are involved from start to finish. Council bureaucrats and Councillors should not connive to deprive the ratepayers of their rights to fully participate in all genuine processes to build our Capital City. We are in this together, but this should be more in practice than rhetoric.

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