



ICN calls on Zimbabwe President to take urgent action to fairly reward and protect nurses in midst of COVID-19 pandemic

Geneva, Switzerland, 13 June 2020 - International Council of Nurses CEO Howard Catton has written to the President of Zimbabwe, Emmerson Mnangagwa, calling on him to address the urgent concerns of front-line nurses facing the intense pressures of COVID-19 pandemic.

Zimbabwe nurses, including the Zimbabwe Nurses Association (ZNA) which is a member of ICN, have felt forced to withdraw their labour as a result of potentially dangerous working conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic and other concerns about their salaries and terms and conditions of service.

Mr Catton said in the letter to the Zimbabwe President:

“Your nurses are in an impossible position, where they feel unable to give the care that their patients deserve, placing them in an unenviable moral dilemma.

‘If they work with inadequate personal protective equipment (PPE), they risk taking the infection home to their communities and families in addition to risking their own health. Yet not working potentially puts the health and wellbeing of patients at risk.’

Mr Catton also pointed out raging inflation was outstripping nurses’ salaries to the extent that they were living below the poverty line, unable to provide for their families.

The ICN CEO called on President Mnangagwa to urgently ensure that negotiations with the nurses resumed so that a fair solution could be found, enabling nurses to go back to caring for their patients.

“Nurses are the life blood of healthcare everywhere, including Zimbabwe: the sooner they are properly remunerated, rewarded and protected, the better it will be for everyone,” added Mr Catton.

President of ZNA, Enock Dongo said, “Nursing is a calling and we are very loyal to our jobs but a calling on its own cannot sustain us. We also need to be properly remunerated so that we can feed our families, pay our rent and the other basic necessities of life. Our employers may think they can break us, but we have nothing less to lose.”

Four weeks ago Zimbabwe health workers, the majority of whom are nurses, declared a total withdrawal of labour due to incapacitation. ZNA has reported that many nurses have been removed from the payroll in an attempt by their employers to force them back to work. The association also says nurses in self-isolation because of suspected COVID-19 infection cannot afford decent food on their meagre salaries, underscoring the lack of respect shown by their employers to the health workforce.

Last week the Zimbabwe President expressed concern about the spike in COVID-19 cases in the country.

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