

CSOs slam repressive PVO law

The Zimbabwean by Lesley Moyo, CITE Zimbabwe

18 April 2025



President Emmerson Mnangagwa

A coalition of Zimbabwean civil society organisations (CSOs) has strongly condemned the recent enactment of the Private Voluntary Organisations (PVO) Amendment Act, describing it as a repressive law that poses a serious threat to democracy, civic space, and human rights in the country.

In a joint statement released on Tuesday, the CSOs said the law “threatens to shut down civic space, criminalise CSOs’ legitimate activities, and undermine Zimbabwe’s constitutional democracy.”

The legislation, which was officially gazetted on 11 April 2025, comes despite years of sustained opposition from civil society, including formal submissions to parliament, engagement with the Attorney General’s Office, and a high-level meeting with President Emmerson Mnangagwa in March 2023.

“A significant milestone in CSOs advocacy was the meeting with President Mnangagwa on 17 March 2023, following which he temporarily withheld assent to the Bill — a hopeful indication of constructive engagement,” the CSOs said. “However, the enactment of the PVO Amendment Act is a betrayal of dialogue and citizen involvement in governance.”

Critics say the law was pushed through without adequate public consultation, with some hearings reportedly marred by violence and intimidation.

“Public consultations in Harare, Chinhoyi, Gweru, and Masvingo were marred by violence and intimidation, forcing legislators to abandon proceedings and silencing the citizens’ voices,” the statement read.

The CSOs argue that not only does the law contradict Zimbabwe’s Constitution, but it also disregards international legal obligations under treaties such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). They also noted that a clause referencing compliance with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) was removed, despite previous justifications citing FATF standards.

“This demonstrates a wilful disregard of global guidance. FATF and UN Special Procedures have recommended that the need for compliance with the FATF Standards and Recommendations should not be used as a justification for closing civic space,” they said.

The concerns are not new. In December 2021, four United Nations Special Rapporteurs warned that the legislation could “have grave consequences for the exercise of civil and political rights, including the right to freedom of association of PVOs in Zimbabwe.”

A follow-up letter from the same UN officials in November 2024 reiterated their reservations and urged the Zimbabwean government not to proceed with the amendments.

Despite these warnings, the government proceeded with the legislation. The CSOs claim this move reflects suspicion and hostility towards their work, which they say has been pivotal in national development and humanitarian relief over the last three decades.

“CSOs in Zimbabwe have historically supported national development and human rights, from the liberation struggle to post-independence reconstruction,” the statement said. “Rather than recognising the role of CSOs as genuine development partners, this law seeks to stifle CSO operations and criminalise genuine contributions.”

The organisations are now calling for the repeal of the PVO Amendment Act and for the government to uphold both constitutional rights and international human rights obligations.

“We urge the Government of Zimbabwe to repeal the PVO Amendment Act to safeguard civic space, constitutionalism and restore public trust,” the statement concluded.

The joint statement was endorsed by more than 40 organisations, including Amnesty International Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights, the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, and Transparency International Zimbabwe.

<https://cite.org.zw/csos-slam-repressive-pvo-law/>