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Min Parirenyatwa clarifies position on cannabis farming

The Minister Health and Child Welfare, Dr. David Parirenyatwa, has clarified the government's position for growing cannabis for medicinal and scientific purposes.

In a recent statement issued by the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Health and Child Care, Dr. Gerald Gwinji on behalf of Minister Parirenyatwa, he said the government had not suspended the farming of cannabis.

The statement was issued out after the Deputy Minister of Finance, Terrence Mukupe had indicated that the government had suspended cannabis farming as it sought to investigate reports received from investors who had applied for licenses to grow crop.

"There has been some miscommunication from different sources, which has caused misunderstanding with regards to government's position to create a framework through legislation, in which the growing, processing and marketing of cannabis and its products for medicinal and industrial use, by duly licensed and monitored entities is legalized," Minister Parirenyatwa said.



David Parirenyatwa

He said Statutory Instrument (SI) 62 of 2018 whose parent

Act is the Dangerous Drugs Act (Chap 15:02), puts the legal framework for this and the SI had not been repealed nor had its implementation been suspended.

The minister also revealed that the Medicines Control Authority of Zimbabwe (MCAZ) was working on necessary provisions before implementation begins.

"The relevant licensing entity for the Ministry of Health and Child Care, MCAZ is with developing the necessary further guidelines to help in operationalization of this SI from a regulatory point of view," said Minister Parirenyatwa.

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“Secondly, work in the actual production of cannabis and its products calls for a multi-sectoral or multi-agency approach as several entities including ministries for agriculture, finance, home affairs, technology and security are also in the process of fine-tuning their roles and facilitation in this new industry.

“It is worth reminding ourselves that this is not a licence to grow mbanje for recreational use, neither is it a licence to sell mbanje on the streets, and it is certainly not a licence to smoke mbanje,” he said.

The benefits by the government of legalising cannabis production are immense as palliative patients will be able to access treatment from easily available and affordable cannabis herbs. It is also welcome news when we consider the potential of the government raising tax revenue from export sales.

Research carried out by respected international scientists has shown that chemical compounds present in cannabis prolong life, improves judgment and quickens the mind.

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Senator Timveous, ZCLDN Director Box to attend AIDS2018

HIV and AIDS Thematic portfolio chairperson, Lilian Timveous and the Zimbabwe Civil Liberties and Drug Network (ZCLDN) director, Wilson Box will next month attend the 22nd International AIDS Conference (AIDS2018) in the Netherlands.

Over 15 000 global leaders, policy makers, researchers and advocates are expected to gather at the RAI Amsterdam Convention Centre from 23 to 27 July for the event where they discuss the latest developments in HIV related research.



Wilson Box with Lilian Timveous

Some of the topics to be discussed during the five-day international conference are; the Combination prevention for adolescents in eastern and southern Africa – evidence from the Evidence for HIV prevention in Southern Africa (EHPSA) programme, medical care for criminalised populations and frontiers in generic and low-cost ARVs in high, provocative hypotheses.

The ZCLDN is concerned that the HIV epidemic remains continuously disproportional among affected key populations and their sexual partners.

In 2016, 25% new infections in sub-Saharan Africa, concerned gay men and other men who have sex with men, sex workers, transgender people, people who inject drugs and people who are imprisoned or subject to other forms of incarceration.

However, global recommendations highlight the importance of a dedicated response to those groups. Yet, in most contexts these key populations are considered to be criminalised by laws.

ZCLDN condemns the killing of 100 people in Bangladesh

The Zimbabwe Civil Liberties and Drug Network (ZCLDN) has learnt with shock the death of 100 people in Bangladesh by that country's police while 7 000 more have been arrested since the country launched a crackdown on drug trafficking in May.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/more-than-100-dead-as-bangladesh-drug-war-escalates>

We note with great concern that the killings and mass arrests have the blessings of Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. In early May, Mr. Hasina approved that the anti-narcotics campaign was meant to halt the growing trade of yaba, as methamphetamine is widely known in Asia.

Among those killed and arrested are mostly refugees from the Myanmar's Rohingya Muslim community including young children that included a 12 year-old refugee boy who was among those arrested last Sunday.

Bangladesh has in the recent past seen an influx of Rohingya fleeing from their country Myanmar. However, as the ZCLDN, we are disturbed that innocent lives including those of young children are being lost during this period.

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The Bangladesh government is a signatory of several international conventions that seek to protect the human rights of its citizens and foreigners.

As a result, we call upon the Bangladesh government to immediately stop the killings and arrests and adopt a humane drug policy that promotes human rights, scientific research and evidence based approach to the challenges faced by people who use drugs.

2 nabbed in Bulawayo with \$135 000 khat drug

Police in Bulawayo on 5 June arrested two men after they were found with a consignment of khat — a dangerous drug — with a street value of \$135 000 which was destined for the United Kingdom.

Undercover police officers arrested a UK-based Zimbabwean man, Mufaro Shaba and Samaita Chinembiri, from Nkulumane suburb in Bulawayo for allegedly dealing in dangerous drugs.



Khat drug

According to the police said that khat was a relatively rare drug in Zimbabwe but was common in eastern African countries. The khat drug looks like dried vegetables.

Bulawayo police spokesperson, Inspector Precious Simango confirmed the arrests and said police intercepted the contraband after

it was shipped from Ethiopia en-route to the UK.

She said police sources had informed detectives that a consignment which was supposed to be collected by Chinembiri contained dangerous drugs.

“We have arrested two suspects in connection with dealing in dangerous drugs. Our detectives received a tip-off that a consignment of dangerous drugs was destined for Tshabalala suburb.

“The detectives monitored its transportation from Robert Mugabe International Airport in Harare to Bulawayo where it was due for collection by one suspect called Chinembiri,” said Insp Simango.

She said instead of Chinembiri receiving the parcel in Bulawayo, Shaba flew into the country to collect the consignment.

The arrests of the two men came only a few days after a South Africa-based Zimbabwe woman and a local woman were also arrested in Bulawayo after she was found with cocaine with an estimated value of \$314 300.

Kwanele Sibanda from Johannesburg contacted Tholiwe Tshuma of Emganwini suburb in Bulawayo to collect the cocaine in Bulawayo on her behalf. Sibanda was arrested on arrival in Bulawayo and has since been remanded in custody while Tshuma is also in remand prison.

Cocaine, meth flood Zim

“Cocaine, crack cocaine, meth, cocaine, diazepam... it just depends on the kind of high a person is looking for”

This is Crispen. No. That's not his real name. Crispen is a Zimbabwean drug lord based in Harare. He agreed to talk to Khuluma Afrika, on condition of anonymity. Crispen was born in Mbare, a densely populated neighbourhood some 5km outside the city center.

Crispen sells all kinds of drugs, except for crystal meth, which he claims is sold out of Highfields, another high-density suburb 12km outside of the city.

Zimbabwe's rising drug abuse epidemic is a new phenomenon. Until recently, the only available drugs were marijuana and 'bronco' — a cough syrup manufactured in South Africa. But cocaine has made its way.

"Everyone now wants upfu (mealie meal) — (the street name for cocaine)" Crispen says.

Crispen claims he pushes big volumes. He sells in town, and sends boys to places where large numbers of people gather to party. He uses prostitutes as well to push drugs to johns.

On the street, a gram of cocaine sells for \$80 a gram. Other drugs like meth sell for \$50 a gram.

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It makes them out of reach for the majority of Zimbabweans. But Crispen has come up with a plan.

"We sell a fix. Like one sniff (cocaine) we make it about \$10." He says.

A lot of the drugs are manufactured outside of Zimbabwe and then smuggled through the border.

It is a lucrative business, which those involved claim is turning them into millionaires.

Casper drives an exquisite 2016 Audi. He came to South Africa in 2009 and worked as a waiter until 2014 when he ventured into the illegal exportation of bronco - a prescription cough syrup, containing codeine.

"I went from sharing a room in Pretoria to living in Kyalami Estates. I have four wives and they all drive top range cars"

"Anything with codeine is my prime product. But lately I now move a lot of ephedrine. Even ecstasy pills are now big bucks"

Ephedrine is the base substance used to manufacture cocaine, crystal meth, and meth cathinone.

Casper spends most of his day at Bosman station, shipping boxes of prescription medication. His main transporters are bus drivers who hide the boxes in luggage compartments.

The cost of purchasing one bottle of cough medication in South Africa and sending it to Zimbabwe is about \$2.80. Once there, each bottle sells for between \$7 to \$10 USD. Casper sends at least 500 bottles a day, and sells 5,000 a week. Factoring in middle men, he claims he makes at least \$15,000 USD a week.

Most discussions about drug abuse in Zimbabwe often neglect substances like cocaine, heroin and alcohol, traditionally because substance abuse has been limited to marijuana and recently prescription cough medication.

But experts contend the 'imported banned substances' problem is bigger and includes drugs traditionally thought to be impossible to find in Zimbabwe and those not thought to be dangerous.

"By far the drug most abused is alcohol due to its ease of acquisition and price. Illicit illegal alcoholic drinks are smuggled into the country, mostly from Mozambique, and these are untested and their ingredients are not known.

For US 50c, one can purchase a 300ml bottle of these concoctions which are believed to contain toxic, dangerous chemicals like isopropanol, a disinfectant found in mouthwash or skin lotions, or methanol, a solvent found in paints and industrial cleaning fluids" says Benson Mudiwa, a Zimbabwean medical doctor based in Swaziland.

While these drugs are making millionaires out of the likes of Casper and Crispen, they are creating problems in Zimbabwe.

The effects of drugs on the human body as well as the public health system has been written about several times. A new effect, imported from South Africa, together with the drugs is mushrooming in town.

'Nyaope boys' – vagrant drug addicts who mill around street corners and engage in petty - crime have surfaced in the streets of Harare. They mill around places like the bus terminuses at Market Square, Copacabana, 4th Street and along Fife avenue shops. They take some of these drugs until they pass out, and wake up to redo the drill.

The addicts, victims of this new wave of drug abuse, are a fire the country may struggle to extinguish.

"Unfortunately, the country is found wanting when it comes to helping and rehabilitating drug users, with the public-sector facility programs almost non-existent, and only one private facility rehabilitating drug users in Harare. Organisations like Narcotics Anonymous (NA) or Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) also have a lethargic almost insignificant presence in Zimbabwe" says Dr Mudiwa.

- Khuluma Afrika is a centre for investigative journalism in Zimbabwe

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