

LAW SCHOOL STUDENTS ESTABLISH THE ZIMBABWE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION AND HOLD THEIR INAUGURAL MEETING



ZJGSU Law School is proud to report on the establishment of the student-led Zimbabwe International Women's Association (ZIWA) and the group's inaugural event on Law and Society in Zimbabwe on Tuesday 28 November 2017.

The concept came about through ten female Law Students having a dream to work together to emancipate Zimbabwean women from mental slavery in order that they can inspire, think and work independently. With the support of the Law School, they have been able to establish ZIWA to raise awareness of women's rights in Zimbabwe and how to exercise them. ZIWA's founding members have identified their core values as integrity, self-driven and community. The group's objectives are to

- develop and raise an awareness in women of their rights, and how they are protected by those rights;
- initiate a program of reform in the attitude towards women's rights from both women, men and societies at large;
- generate a support network that motivates, encourages and empowers women;
- facilitate a network platform for information exchange and skill development;
- develop a platform where there are accessible mentorship programs for young women; and
- foster independent thinking in women.

The founding members of ZIWA with the Law School's Professor Suzannah Linton



The Chair of the meeting, Stephanie Maroveke, opened the event and managed the proceedings with elegance and warmth. ZIWA President Memory Moyo inspired the gathering of twenty-five by explaining how the group came about and laid out the vision of the founders. She addressed the significance of the theme colours chosen: black (for strength), white (for peace) and pink (for hope). Phoebe Nyashanu argued eloquently for the need for female solidarity and belief in the self, and underscored how it is frequently women who hold other women back. Yvette Mutemeri spoke authoritatively on Zimbabwean law as well as concrete challenges facing women in Zimbabwe due to culture and tradition. She astutely identified the need for women to stand up for themselves rather than just accept injustice and wrong-doing as the woman's lot in life. Josephine Chawanika ably facilitated the open discussion, commencing with some meaningful personal reflections.

Professor Suzannah Linton of the Law School gave the keynote address, stressing *inter alia*, that equality is about women and girls being given choices and opportunities so that they can maximise their potential in life. It is not about women becoming clones of men, but about creating a world that is shaped for and by *both* women and men. It is about respecting females for who they are and valuing what is different about them, and the legitimacy of their non-male approaches and skills. She challenged all those present to open their minds to the realities, but also to be aware of the tools that do exist for addressing inequality and discrimination, and to use these to help girls and women enjoy the choices and opportunities that they have had.



The open discussion engaged with issues such as the prostitution of young girls, and parental responsibilities for bringing up boys to respect females, and girls to feel confident and as cherished and valued as boys. Participants discussed the expectations about men and women, particularly in the context of marriage. They debated how the boy-child is treated differently from the girl-child, and shared what goes on at 'kitchen parties' and the Zimbabwean practice of dowries (roora/lobola). Participants also had good laughs and shared some culinary hospitality thanks to the organisers and the Law School. The meeting concluded with a discussion on the way forward for ZIWA and future activities.





Photographs by Irufan Ahmed