

Zimbabwe: Fears of Zimbabwe health crisis as row over doctors' pay continues

The government has suspended 550 medical staff and ruled the ongoing strikes over pay and conditions unlawful

Thursday 3 January 2019, by [CHINGONO Nyasha](#) (Date first published: 31 December 2018).

A month-long impasse between government and doctors over pay and conditions has left Zimbabwe's health care system in a critical state, after the government suspended more than 500 medical staff last week.

The government refuses to give in to the doctors' demands and has ordered striking doctors to return to their posts.

Acting president, retired general Constantino Chiwenga fired more than 550 doctors and radiographers on Christmas Eve over the strike which the government ruled as unlawful.

Junior doctors in [Zimbabwe](#) earn just \$329 a month, despite many years of training and study.

Doctors are calling for increased monthly salaries and on-call pay, and for the government to address the shortage of medical supplies and equipment in hospitals.

Since July, Zimbabwe has suffered an economic downturn, characterised by soaring inflation, a drop in standards of living and disposable income, worsening social services and an acute shortage of essential goods and services.

The situation was worsened by the 1 August [shootings in Harare](#), where six civilians died, in circumstances largely condemned by the international community.

Under the rule of Robert Mugabe and his successor, President Emmerson Mnangagwa, Zimbabwean medical practitioners have faced harsh working conditions and stagnating pay.

The Zimbabwe Hospital Doctors' Association ([ZHDA](#)) has [vowed to continue with the strike until government meets their demands](#).

Other junior doctors who have recently graduated from various medical schools have also vowed to refuse any employment offers from government, saying they cannot be employed under "duress".

Junior doctors expressed dismay at what they feel is the government's lack of concern.

Roseline Makaza said: "It is tough to be a doctor in Zimbabwe. You are forced to work inhumane hours. I'm on call every other day attending to patients, I'm a medical practitioner not a student. I graduated and I deserve to be treated with respect.

"All I want is to plan my life. I can't even plan my next move because what I am earning is too little to even take care of my family."

Due to the prolonged strike, junior doctors' salaries have been frozen pending their return to work.

The ZHDA is worried that the strike would further cripple the country's health system.

ZHDA spokesperson, Mthabisi Bhebhe said: "The demands that have been made by doctors have not been met and now the citizens and our patients are suffering the most."

Zimbabwe last experienced a prolonged doctors strike, which almost crippled the country's health delivery system, in 2008 at the height of the hyperinflationary period.

Another striking doctor, Wallace Hlambelo complained that he had nothing to show for the years of study, adding that he was still dependent on his parents.

"I feel like I am overburdening my parents. The money we earn is not enough to take [care] of them," he said.

[Chiwenga fired thousands of](#) nurses in April after they too went on strike over poor pay and conditions. The nurses were later reinstated after mediation with nurses council.

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