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## **Cost Of Living Shoots Up 50% in Zimbabwe**

By Staff Reporter

Harare — There's little joy for consumers this festive season in Zimbabwe where the cost of living shot up by nearly 50 percent last month, the Consumer Council of Zimbabwe (CCZ) was reported as saying on Wednesday.

An urban family now needs 209,000 Zimbabwe dollars (R5,944) to meet its basic food, housing, transport and clothing needs for a month, way above the average wage, the consumer watchdog said.

Most wage-earners in inflation-riddled Zimbabwe earn less than 50,000 Zimbabwe dollars (R1,422) per month and shoppers are resigned to seeing prices escalate on a near-daily level.

Zimbabwe's economy is in meltdown, with massive unemployment, inflation hovering at levels above 1,070 percent and many locals desperate for any chance to leave the country.

There were staggering increases in the prices of basics in November, with the staple maize-meal shooting up by 197.7 percent, cooking oil by 196.1 per cent and transport by 50 percent, said the state-controlled Herald newspaper.

Life is getting harder by the day for many here and levels of dissatisfaction are rising.

The main Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) on Tuesday threatened protests in the new year if the government failed to meet basic demands to hike minimum wage levels, provide free life-prolonging antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) to those living with HIV and Aids and stop the arrests of street traders, reports said.

The CCZ, a quasi-government body, accused businesses of trying to maximise profits at the expense of suffering consumers.

There is need for stakeholders in business to increase prices based on factors of production instead of unilaterally hiking prices to maximise profits, the watchdog said in comments carried by the Herald.

President Robert Mugabe's government says businesses are working in cahoots with Western powers and the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) to sabotage the economy, and there are new moves to jail price-hikers.

But businessmen say they are only trying to stay afloat in Zimbabwe's struggling economy and have to hike prices because the local currency is fast losing value on the widely-used parallel market.

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