

# Zambia elections - lessons for Zimbabwe

*By Zimbabwe Election Support Network*

The Zimbabwe Election Support Network sent a 15 member mission to observe Zambia's tripartite elections held on the 20<sup>th</sup> of September 2011. The objectives of the mission were multifaceted and included; to observe the Zambia's electoral processes, to explore and understand civil society initiatives within and around the electoral process. Lastly, the mission sought to glean lessons and insights to inform Zimbabweans as we prepare for the referendum and the general elections in the future.

## ***Biometric Voters Roll***

Zambia uses a polling station based voters roll with each polling stream having a separate biometric voters register. On average the number of voters registered and voting in each polling stream did not exceed 850 which made the voting and counting process more efficient. The voters roll includes names of people who have been removed from the register and reasons for removal which in some cases were duplications, death and change of residence. Such information made for increased transparency and inclusivity and provided for a voters roll which is complete, comprehensive and up to date.

## ***Peace campaigns***

The mission observed that there was a deliberate effort to have a peaceful election and this was evidenced from the many calls for peace from the youths, eminent persons such as the former president of Zambia, Dr Kenneth Kaunda. While the atmosphere was peaceful there were undertones of tension and suspicion of electoral irregularities which marred almost peaceful electoral campaigns. Peace campaigns mainly targeted the youths who similar to Zimbabwe have been used as instruments of violence. The peaceful atmosphere provided room for political parties to campaign though some incidents of violence were experienced during the campaign phase.

## ***People living with disability***

While the ECZ made efforts ensure inclusion of People Living with Disability (PWDs) in electoral processes through the provision of a tactile ballot paper for the visually impaired, this was only limited to the presidential ballot and not to house of assembly and local government. It is also commendable to note that news broadcasters had a sign language interpreter for hearing impaired as they aired the news. This increased inclusivity and reduced marginalisation. However there was need to do more to include the vote of PWDs, such as voter education and improving accessibility of polling stations.

## ***Conflict resolution mechanisms***

The Electoral Commission of Zambia took a proactive role in dealing with conflicts that are inevitable in electoral politics. A pocket sized manual was published to provide information to citizens and political parties on the mechanisms for resolving electoral conflicts that may arise. This meant that the commission acknowledged the presence of conflicts and also sought to find ways to resolve them amicably. In addition, a code of conduct signed by political parties was publicised and it was justiciable which reduced impunity.

## ***The role of the security sector in electoral processes***

The role of the security sector is defined and the mission observed that the police were trained on their mandate by the commission before the election and were able to stay within their mandate. The role of the security sector was to maintain peace and order as well as secure the election and citizens. The role of the military and police remained apolitical and restricted to law and order.

### ***Election results management***

While the election was done in a transparent manner and election results for parliamentary and local government elections were announced by returning officers at constituency levels, there were a few hitches with the announcement of presidential results. The delays resulted in agitation and tension which resulted in riots some areas.

### ***The media***

The polarisation of the media in Zambia did not create values of tolerance and peaceful co-existence in society. It was clear that state broadcasters supported the Movement for Multiparty Democracy and the private media were supportive of the opposition political parties. At times some media houses seemed to incite violence which was inimical to a peaceful election.

### ***Transfer of power***

Of importance to note was the presence of mechanisms to transfer power in Zambia which is a problematic aspect in Africa where incumbents find it difficult to relinquish power. It is important that mechanisms for transfer of power be provided for to enable a smooth transition to a new dispensation when there is a change of government.

### ***Implications for Zimbabwe***

A number of lessons can be drawn from Zambia's electoral processes. The need for clean and credible voters roll that is perceived as comprehensive, up to date and complete by all stakeholders builds confidence in the electorate and all stakeholders. Politicians and political parties need to preach the message of peace and mean it and with political will it is possible to have a peaceful election. The election management body needs to take proactive measures to address political violence and stem it before it goes out of hand. A code of conduct for political parties and the media is necessary in environments such as Zimbabwe which are volatile and prone to violence. The role of the security sector in elections needs to be managed and the security sector need to stay within their mandate of ensuring law and order as well as peace and not dabbling in politics. Mechanisms for transfer of power need to be in place should there be a change of government, elections are contestations for power and as such there is the likelihood of change of government, thus power transfer mechanisms should be in place and clear. Zambia's peaceful election is a demonstration that with political will a peaceful election is possible. Ends//

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