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# ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



## ZESN'S COMMENT ON ELECTION DATES

**HARARE – 27 September 2012-** Mindful of the importance of elections, the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) has learnt that harmonised elections and referendum might be held next year in March and this year in November respectively.

It is with great concern that the network has noted that these revelations come against a backdrop of a constitution making process that has remained unclear and stagnated. ZESN remains adamant that logistically it is impossible to hold a referendum in November and elections in March. There are a number of important issues that needs to be dealt with and these include;

- Resourcing ZEC with adequate funds to prepare for the elections
- Adequate publicising of the draft constitution before it is put up for referendum
- Revising of the Referendum Act (since the law is outdated)
- Effecting a number of technical changes in the Electoral bill if it is gazetted into law
- Updating and cleaning the Voter's Roll.

Holding democratic elections is critical for Zimbabwe thus ZESN believes that the reforms form a solid foundation for the creation of a conducive environment and fair playing field in the electoral process. ZESN reiterates that there is need for fundamental reforms that will pave way for a conducive electoral environment. ZESN has consistently advised and cautioned against rushing into elections before addressing the following preconditions:-

### CONDUCTIVE ENVIRONMENT

- ✚ Reformed Electoral Legislative Framework and repressive legislation (POSA, AIPPA) including removal of Presidential Powers in respect of elections
- ✚ An end to violence and intimidation
- ✚ Dismantling of all structures of violence
- ✚ Respect and upholding of fundamental freedoms (freedom of movement, association, expression and assembly)

### VOTERS' ROLL

- ✚ Registration of eligible citizens [birth certificates, IDs, lost identity documents]
- ✚ Relaxation of strict registration requirements [e.g. proof of residence]
- ✚ Adequate dissemination of information on the voters' registration process including the inspection of the roll
- ✚ Access to the electronic and other formats of the voters' roll at no cost at any time by all stakeholders.
- ✚ Cleaning and audit of the current voters' roll
- ✚ Reform of external voting provisions to enable voting by all eligible Zimbabweans in the Diaspora; coupled with adequate checks and balance to ensure transparency and integrity

### ELECTION MANAGEMENT BODY

- ✚ Truly independent Electoral Commission, fully responsible for all electoral related and activities, accountable to the people through Parliament. For example ZEC should be in charge of inviting and accrediting observers [local, regional and international]

- ✚ ZEC should be provided with adequate resources for running the election including preparation and voter education.
- ✚ ZEC to be open and communicate timeously with the public and other stakeholders.

## **OBSERVERS**

- ✚ Observers (international, regional and local) should be invited early to enable deployment three (3) months before and one (1) month after the elections
- ✚ Preliminary assessment teams should be allowed access now to assess the political environment and to do post election follow-up.
- ✚ SADC observers to be Monitors as opposed to Observers, with the ability to play an interventionist role on Polling day
- ✚ Regional civic observers should also be invited and accredited on time
- ✚ No cherry-picking of observers
- ✚ Full access to all electoral processes especially in the rural areas
- ✚ Decentralized registration and accreditation of local observers
- ✚ Security of observers must be guaranteed by the State
- ✚ Clear guidelines for the observers should be drawn up

## **MEDIA**

- ✚ Equitable Access to the public media by all political parties and candidates-free airtime for political parties during prime time viewing
- ✚ Reasonable charges for airtime for political parties
- ✚ ZEC to enforce the public broadcaster on its role and that it gives equitable coverage of all political players, non negative coverage, hate speech
- ✚ ZEC must enforce advertising ethics-code of conduct for political parties and the public broadcaster (content and structure of adverts and political messages)
- ✚ ZEC to monitor public media to observe non partisan reportage during elections.

## **TRANSPARENCY IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS**

- ✚ Transparency in all processes including distribution of ballot papers, processing of special votes, postal votes, and results management
- ✚ Timely announcement of results within the confines of the law and punitive measures to be enforced for non compliance
- ✚ Respect of the will of the people
  - ***DISPUTE RESOLUTION MECHANISMS***
- ✚ Timely dispute resolution mechanisms including the speedy resolution of election related litigation

ZESN urges the government to ensure that Zimbabwe conducts its elections in accordance with the regionally and internationally accepted Guidelines and Principles governing democratic elections as the benchmark that Zimbabwe is signatory to. With a vision of improving future elections, ZESN notes that failure to implement any significant reforms will have damning effects on peace and security in Zimbabwe and the region at large. ZESN therefore calls for political will in ensuring that electoral reforms are out in place and implemented. ZESN is also calling for clear time frames that can be respected and guide all political parties and involved stakeholders in their planning.

In conclusion we urge SADC to continue making clear demands for minimum reforms ahead of any future elections in Zimbabwe. Ends//



*FOR COMMENTS AND FURTHER DETAILS CONTACT*

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