

ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



PRELIMINARY STATEMENT: EPWORTH, MARONDERA CENTRAL AND MBIRE PARLIAMENTARY BY-ELECTIONS

20 September 2015-Harare- ZESN as part of its oversight role in the promotion of democratic elections in Zimbabwe observed the September 19 by-elections held in Epworth, Marondera Central and Mbire constituencies. The seats fell vacant following the death on 9 June, 2015 of the ZANU-PF incumbent for Epworth constituency Ambassador Amos Midzi and the expulsion from ZANU PF and subsequent recalling from Parliament of Ray Kaukonde and David Butau former Members of Parliament for Marondera Central and Mbire respectively.

Methodology

ZESN deployed 62 short term observers comprising static observers based at some of the Ward and constituency collation centres. There were also teams of mobile observers in the three constituencies who were assessing the political environment in the areas outside of the polling stations. ZESN's observers adhere to a strict code of conduct and carry out their duties in conformity to the Electoral Laws of Zimbabwe and regional and international principles and guidelines such as the African Union Charter on Democracy and Governance.

Opening and voting and counting procedures

Everywhere ZESN observed polling stations opened on time with adequate polling personnel and voting materials. According to reports by our observers they were an average of six polling officials at each polling station three of whom being women. ZESN observers reported that important voting procedures such as checking of names in the voters' roll, marking of fingers with indelible ink and ensuring that voters cast their ballots in secret were clearly followed. Counting procedures were conducted in accordance with the law and ZESN observer reports show that this was confirmed by political party agents who signed the V11 forms at the end of the process. Results of the polls were posted outside all polling stations where ZESN observed.

Polling station based voting

ZEC piloted the polling station based voting system in Marondera Central as the Commission prepares to introduce the system for the impending 2018 harmonised elections. ZESN observer reports noted the use of two voters' rolls namely the polling station based voters' rolls and a supplementary roll based on the previous ward based voters' rolls in the constituency. The use of the two voters' rolls resulted in some electoral stakeholders questioning ZEC's preparedness for the polling station based voting system and ability to implement the system on a macro level. ZESN notes that international best practice encourages the use of a single voters' roll in order to enhance stakeholder confidence.

Voter Intimidation

ZESN received reports of voter intimidation in Marondera Central where political party representatives were allegedly recording the serial numbers at the back of registration slips during voter registration in a bid to intimidate voters and influence their voting preferences. ZESN notes with worry the continued reports of intimidation in elections in Zimbabwe as such actions have implications on how free people are to vote and subsequently the freeness and fairness of the election. There were also reports of the destruction of election campaign posters of opposition parties in Mbire constituency.

Assisted voters

ZESN observer reports continue to note significant numbers of assisted voters in isolated polling stations. Worrying reports of assisted voters were received from Makuvatsine Primary school where a total of 91 people had been assisted to vote by late afternoon.

Recommendations:

- ZESN calls upon ZEC to investigate reports of alleged intimidation in Marondera Central and the destruction of opposition campaign posters in Mbire to ensure that the right to freely choose representatives is respected and political parties adhere to the code of conduct.
- ZEC must put in place clear measures for the reporting and resolution of conflicts and claims of intimidation and the Commission should publicise and enforce the political parties' code of conduct.
- In addition, the organisation reiterates its calls for the government to speed up alignment of electoral related laws with the Constitution as well as implement electoral reforms in particular the creation of a conducive electoral environment that guarantees the respect and enjoyment of universal suffrage and fundamental freedoms.
- We urge the ZEC to incorporate lessons from the Marondera Central polling station based voter registration pilot exercise in the deployment of future voter registration models and to consider the adoption of new ICTs such as inclusion of biometrics in voter registration and new ICTs in results management and transmission.
- The government must ensure that it ratifies, domesticates and implement the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Good Governance ahead of the 2018 elections.
- ZESN reinforces the need for continued collaboration by ZEC with key electoral stakeholders such as civil society in conducting comprehensive voter education in order to enhance voters understanding of key electoral processes and requirements.

ZESN remains committed to fostering a culture of human rights and promoting democratic elections in Zimbabwe.

PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE

FOR COMMENTS AND FURTHER DETAILS CONTACT

ZESN Chairperson: +263774044213

ZESN Programme Coordinator: +263772219462

+263 (04) 791443, 798193, 791803, 250736

zesn@africaonline.co.zw / info@zesn.org.zw or visit www.zesn.org.zw