

ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



ZESN'S PRELIMINARY STATEMENT ON THE MHONDORO-MUBAIRA PARLIAMENTARY BY-ELECTION

6 March 2016 - ZESN observed the Mhondoro-Mubaira National Assembly by-election held on 5 March 2016 as part of its oversight role in promoting democratic elections in Zimbabwe. The seat became vacant following the expulsion from ZANU PF and subsequent recalling from Parliament of former MP Sylvester Nguni. Only two parties contested in the by-election namely; ZANU PF and the Freedom Front Party.

Methodology

ZESN deployed 15 short term observers comprising static observers based at the ward and constituency collation centres. In addition, ZESN had two mobile observer teams in the constituency assessing the political environment outside of the polling stations. ZESN's election observers adhere to a strict code of conduct and carry out their duties in conformity to the Electoral Laws of Zimbabwe. ZESN assesses the compliance of the conduct of elections using regional and international principles and guidelines such as the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections and the African Union Charter on Democracy and Governance.

Opening and voting Procedures

At all polling stations where ZESN observed opening, observers reported that opening procedures were followed and conducted 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. 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 followed.

Political Parties' Agents

In most polling stations where ZESN observers were deployed we observed that only ZANU PF had agents inside the polling station. Political parties contesting the by-election were allowed to have one agent inside the polling station and to have an additional agent stationed within the vicinity of the polling station. The failure by Freedom Front party to field party agents is regrettable given the importance of having party representatives in polling stations to assess whether the by-election was held in conformity to local, regional and international standards and best practice.

Polling Station Based Voting System

ZEC used the polling station based voter registration system in Mhondoro-Mubaira. ZESN observed the continued use of polling station based voters' rolls as well as a supplementary roll based on the previous ward based voters' rolls. This becomes the third time that the Commission has utilized two separate voters' rolls (main and supplementary rolls) under the polling station based voting system. The Main voters' roll for Mhondoro-Mubaira has 20,407 voters and the Supplementary has 16,225 voters. There is need for clarification from ZEC as to the continued use of two voters' rolls for each polling station. The continued use of the two separate voters' rolls raises questions over ZEC preparedness to fully implement the system for the 2018 harmonised elections. ZESN reiterates its position that international best practice encourages the use of a single voters' roll in order to enhance stakeholder confidence as well as integrity of the electoral process.

Police presence

ZESN observers noted a heavy presence of police officers inside and outside of polling stations especially at the Ward collation centres with an average of six police officers per polling station. The heavy presence of police officers at polling stations might be intimidating to voters.

Counting

Counting procedures were done in line with the provisions of the law with political party agents confirming by signing the V11 forms at the end of the counting process. In line with the requirements of the law the election results were posted outside all polling stations where ZESN observed.

Turnout

ZESN observer reports show that the turnout was generally low especially for the youth in Mhondoro-Mubaira. This trend of low participation in electoral processes is consistent with trends during previous by-elections held in 2014 and 2015.

Recommendations:

- ZESN recommends that ZEC comes up with a more comprehensive voter registration methodology that ensures that all eligible voters are captured by the new polling station based voter registration system.
- The capacity of the Voter Registration department at the Commission should be enhanced to enable the consolidation of the main voters' rolls with the Supplementary Rolls into one voters' roll. The use of one voters' roll in future elections will greatly enhance the transparency and integrity of the electoral processes
- ZEC should consider piloting the biometric voter registration (BVR) in future by-elections as it prepares to introduce the system in 2018, the adoption of BVR will go a long way in enhancing transparency and integrity of the voter registration processes in Zimbabwe.

- ZEC should devise voter education programmes that lure the youth to fully participate in electoral processes as the level of participation of youths in electoral processes remains low.
- Political parties must ensure that they train and deploy party agents to all polling stations to enable them to speak authoritatively on the electoral processes in Zimbabwe.
- In view of limited funding for elections there is a need to review the timing and frequency of by-elections in Zimbabwe.

ZESN remains committed to promoting democratic elections and electoral processes in Zimbabwe. ZESN will continue advocating for electoral reforms and a conducive electoral and political environment.

By-Election Results

Candidate	Political Party	Votes received
George Gangarahwe	ZANU PF	13,934
Rodwell Nyanganya	Freedom Front Party	1,056
Rejected votes		468

PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE

FOR COMMENTS AND FURTHER DETAILS CONTACT
 ZESN National Director: +263712415902
 +263 (04) 791443, 798193, 791803, 250736
zesn2011@zesn.net / info@zesn.net or visit www.zesn.org.zw