

Press statement

ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



ZESN HOLDS A POST 2013 HARMONISED ELECTIONS REVIEW CONFERENCE

14 March 2014 – BULAWAYO – More than 100 members of civic society organisations (CSOs) working around elections, good governance and democracy in Zimbabwe and the region met in Bulawayo from 13 – 14 March to review the harmonized elections held in 2013. The conference was organized by the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) with a view of reflecting on Zimbabwe’s electoral processes, observations and exploring lessons learnt from the electoral process.

The conference highlighted positive and negative issues that characterized the July 31 harmonized elections. These included challenges encountered in the electoral processes such as incomprehensive voter registration and the inaccessibility of the voters’ roll to political parties on time, inadequate voter education, inequitable coverage of elections by the media, absence of accountability and transparency of political parties funding, misuse of state resources, overprinting of ballot papers, disenfranchisement of the youth and people with disabilities, women’s participation and the high prevalence of assisted voters.

The conference noted that intra-party democracy has not developed fully as highlighted by the disputed primary elections among the major parties in the country. In addition, the legal framework that governed the harmonized elections was inadequate with various important laws not having been aligned with the new constitution thereby creating numerous loopholes that rendered the process not entirely credible.

The Conference drew insights from presenters from the SADC region and East Africa who shared their experiences in relation to electoral processes in their countries. The role of SADC and AU in the Zimbabwe elections was interrogated as regards their assessment of the electoral outcome. Participants reflected on the CSOs’ roles in the electoral process highlighting among other issues the limited participation of CSOs in vital electoral processes such as voter education.

Voter registration is the backbone of every election hence the conference explored the use of technology in voter registration, electoral processes and its impact. Though technology can enhance integrity of the election, there is need to explore its applicability in the context of Zimbabwe as it has its pros and cons. With regards to voter registration the conference noted that biometric voter registration should instill trust and confidence in the electoral process. As such, if Zimbabwe chooses to adopt bio-metric systems there is need for adequate planning and provision of adequate resources timeously. The conference therefore reinforced the need for ZEC and interested stakeholders to interrogate the different approaches and methodologies to voter registration and their applicability to the Zimbabwean context.

Notwithstanding the challenges that surrounded the harmonized elections and discussions on the evolving electoral processes CSOs present agreed that:

1. The government should avail adequate resources to ZEC to begin work on the key processes of the electoral cycle such as voter registration; polling station based voting;
2. CSOs play a crucial role in electoral processes and hence should maintain their watchdog role particularly on polling station based voters' registration to ensure transparency and credibility of electoral processes;
3. CSOs should engage with ZEC and strategic key government institutions for inclusion in future electoral processes;
4. ZEC should address issues pertaining to free participation of people living with disabilities, the youth and women in elections;
5. A range of laws curtailing freedom of expression and access to information should be reviewed in line with the new constitution;
6. There is need to conduct adequate and inclusive voter education and ZEC should involve CSOs in voter education;
7. The polling station based voters' roll should be implemented in-line with electoral laws;
8. The process of realignment of the current laws with the Constitution should be expedited for the protection of human rights. **End//**