

## ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



### GOVERNMENT POSITION ON BIOMETRIC VOTER REGISTRATION NOT CLEAR

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**15 March, 2016** – The Zimbabwe Election Support (ZESN) notes the comments that were attributed to Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa in The Herald of 10 March, 2016 on a number of electoral reforms that the government is proposing ahead of the 2018 harmonised elections. Of particular interest is the issue of embracing what the paper termed “biometric (electronic) voting system”. ZESN supports the introduction of appropriate technologies in electoral processes and calls upon the government to clarify the exact type of technology they seek to introduce.

The use of technology in electoral processes has been adopted by a number of countries and can be utilized in voter registration, polling day using verification machines and electronic voting and in results management. The article in The Herald does not specify whether the government will embrace both Biometric Voter Registration and electronic voting system. Therefore, ZESN urges the government to clarify whether Zimbabwe will adopt both the biometric voter registration and electronic voting systems. ZESN’s view is that the implementation of technology in electoral processes should be staggered in phases with the current reform mainly focusing on Biometric Voter Registration.

ZESN’s understanding is that Biometric Voter Registration is where one or more physical, biological behavioural characteristics are stored usually in a database and used for *identification* and *verification* of the voters unmistakably using biometric identifiers such as fingerprints or iris of the eye. Electronic or e-voting is voting using electronic means to either aid or take care of the chores of casting and counting votes in place of ballot papers. Countries such as Brazil, Germany, USA, Venezuela and Namibia use electronic voting machines while countries such as Kenya, Uganda and Ghana have adopted Biometric Voter Registration systems. ZESN understands that Zimbabwe is currently undertaking Biometric Voter Registration.

ZESN believes that the Biometric Voter Registration system accompanied by other electoral reforms has great potential to transform the electoral system in Zimbabwe given that it offers significant protection against double registrations and inaccuracies. In addition, ZESN notes that the BVR system requires careful planning, preparation and implementation which if not properly planned and implemented could have more disastrous consequences to the integrity and credibility of the electoral process.

Furthermore, although the technology offers solutions to some of the challenges that have bedeviled Zimbabwe’s electoral processes especially voter registration it is not a solution for lack of political will and

does not regulate human behaviours with regards to manipulation and errors. Technology cannot, for instance, replace the need for political will for reforms in Electoral law and practice.

Furthermore we noted that ZEC is set to replace the finger dipping indelible ink with indelible ink marker pens on Election Day. ZESN urges the Commission to procure indelible ink marker pens of the highest quality given that indelible ink is not infallible and can be manipulated.

ZESN reiterates its position that although the adoption of the polling station based voters' roll and biometric voting system will enhance transparency and credibility of electoral processes there is need for political will to facilitate for the creation of a conducive political environment. In addition, equal access to the media, adequate resourcing and enhancing capacity of ZEC, continuous voter education, and access to the voters' rolls by all political parties and an open data policy on electoral processes including results management among a plethora of other electoral reforms must be implemented.

ZESN is committed to promoting democratic elections in Zimbabwe.

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**PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE  
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