

ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



REINTRODUCTION OF PROOF OF RESIDENCE FOR VOTER REGISTRATION IS RETROGRESSIVE - ZESN

19 June 2017 – The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) is concerned by the reintroduction of the requirement for proof of residence for voter registration by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC). ZESN notes that the initial proposal in the draft voter registration regulations to scrap the need for the proof of residence was a welcome development, given that in the past, stringent requirements resulted in the disenfranchisement of significant numbers of voters.

ZESN believes that it is imperative for the Commission to clarify whether the recommendation to have the proof of residence reinstated is a common and shared position amongst consulted stakeholders.

ZESN calls upon the Commission to reconsider its position to reintroduce the need for potential registrants to produce proof of residence in order to avoid the challenges experienced during the previous especially amongst youth and urban voters. Furthermore, the Network urges ZEC to resuscitate the stakeholder engagement forums that were aborted earlier in the year to enhance transparency in electoral processes.

In light of the significant number of potential registrants who do not have their own houses, ZEC should conduct comprehensive voter education and widely publicize mechanisms that are available should one fail to produce proof of residence to ensure that no voters are disenfranchised.

According to the draft voter registration regulations circulated by the Commission to electoral stakeholders, voters were required to affirm to a registration officer their physical address without providing proof of residence. ZESN thus believes that in the spirit of transparency and engagement, the Commission should have provided feedback on stakeholders' submissions and made further consultations on the changes made to the regulations before presenting them to the Ministry of Justice Legal and Parliamentary Affairs for promulgation.

In order to ensure ease of voter registration of vulnerable and special needs groups including people living with disabilities, pregnant and nursing mothers and the elderly, ZESN urges the Commission to make provisions for these groups in the regulations. Mechanisms could include provision of separate queues or special treatment to avoid discrimination against the vulnerable groups during the voter registration process.

In addition, ZESN believes it is important for ZEC to clearly indicate the role of observers during the voter registration process in order to enhance credibility and transparency of the voter registration exercise and ensure that observers are able to play their critical watchdog role without impediments.

ZESN is committed to the promotion of democratic electoral processes in Zimbabwe.

**PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE
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