

Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN)



ZESN WELCOMES COMMENCEMENT OF CONTINUOUS BIOMETRIC VOTER REGISTRATION

20 September 2017 - The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) welcomes the commencement of the Biometric Voter Registration exercise at the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) district offices. The rolling out of the registration exercise at district level facilitates the continuous registration of voters as stipulated by the law. ZESN notes that an inclusive and comprehensive voter registration is the backbone of any successful election and as such is closely observing the voter registration exercise at the district centres. ZESN will also deploy observers to cover the nationwide registration to be conducted in all the wards.

ZESN has made the following observations since the commencement of the exercise on Monday 18 September, 2017:

- 1. Distribution of Voter Registration Centers:** ZEC established registration centers in all 63 districts of Zimbabwe. ZESN observers have reported discrepancies in the days that the centers started registration and also the times that the centers are open. It appears that the ZEC officials manning the registration centers are also the same officials conducting the ongoing training for provincial registration officers.
- 2. Election Roadmap:** Despite repeated requests for a clear elections roadmap, ZEC has, to date, not furnished stakeholders with a detailed roadmap with specific start and end dates for different processes. It appears ZEC made an impromptu decision to use the available kits intended for the training of trainers exercise for the ongoing voter registration. Currently, independent observers, party agents, and the media have not yet been accredited. There is need for the aforementioned actors to be accredited so that the whole process can be subjected to observation.
- 3. Opening Times of Registration Centres:** Registration centers did not open on the 14th of September 2017, in accordance with the Presidential proclamation which indicated the start of the voter registration exercise.
- 4. Voter Education:** It would have been prudent for the proclamation to be preceded by effective voter education, for instance, informing the public about the location of the voter registration centers. Communication regarding registration forms and proof of residence seems rather poor. It has so far been observed that registrants are being told about the process at the point of registration, for example, that the form needs to be signed by a commissioner of oaths. The public also needs to know when the rest of the BVR kits will be

deployed to the wards. Adequate signage would also help people to locate the registration centers.

5. **Pilot Voter Registration:** The Commission needed to conduct a pilot registration process. This was not done. So it appears that the voter registration happening at the different district centers is, in more ways than one, the pilot that ZEC is conducting and therefore the Commission must make use of the experience to prepare for the nationwide exercise. ZEC needs to appraise stakeholders of all the lessons and challenges they will encounter in the period between the Presidential proclamation of start dates and the day the ZEC deploys the kits at the ward level. Further, ZEC also needs to rectify noted challenges when scaling the process up to the nationwide registration.
6. **Efficiency of the Registration Processes:** During several stakeholder consultative meetings ZEC indicated that it would need an average of 4 minutes to register a single voter. Indications from ZESN observers on the ground show that the process is taking much longer. On average, the process is taking about 10 minutes. In some cases it is taking more than 20 minutes. It also appears that there is need for ZEC to reconfigure the software on the kits as the delays in processing time can be attributed to the considerable time it is taking to look up the polling station where the registrant would like to cast their vote. In Bulawayo, observers reported that there were some technical glitches that resulted in significant delays to registering voters.
7. **Proof of Residence:** Some ZESN observers have indicated that some registrants have had to look for a commissioner of oaths away from the registration centres. For instance, in Mutare and Harare the centres did not have commissioner of oaths with registrants having to seek for the services elsewhere for a fee. ZESN notes that ZEC needs to ensure that every registration center has a commissioner of oaths as part of the registration team to ensure that registrants without a proof of residents are not turned away. In addition, ZEC should explicitly state the acceptable lifespan of proof of residence documents given that at some centres people were being turned away after being informed that their proof of residence documents were outdated and therefore invalid.
8. **BVR Court Challenge:** The MDC-T challenged the President's proclamation of BVR dates arguing that the President should not have proclaimed registration dates before ZEC procured servers to store the data. The case is supposed to be heard on the 21st of September, 2017. The basis of the court application is on concerns over absence of servers to store the information, transmission of data from registration centre to district servers and national servers, access of political parties to inspect the servers before information is stored in the servers, and auditing of information stored in the servers. In addition, the MDC-T argued that people are still acquiring Identity Documents in the nationwide exercise by the Registrar General.
9. **Amendment of Electoral Act:** The President gazetted Statutory Instrument 117 of 2017 in terms of Section 2 of the Presidential Powers (Temporary Measures) Act. There were

amendments to Sections 24, 25 and 36 of the Electoral Act. The amendments to Section 36A seek to address the issue of re-registering of existing voters to enable the smooth running of the new registration of voters. ZESN notes that it is imperative to adopt a holistic approach to electoral law reform as opposed to the piecemeal reforms that have been effected to date. ZESN believes that the immediate and comprehensive alignment of electoral laws will allow sufficient time for implementation before the election.

ZESN will continue to observe the registration process and issue updates based on reports from its observers in the field. The Network urges all eligible Zimbabwean citizens to register to vote under the BVR exercise.

#usasarire #ungasalile #register2vote – REMEMBER, IF YOU DON'T REGISTER YOU CANT VOTE

PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE

ZESN Chairperson: +263775642217

ZESN Director: +263712415902

zesn2011@zesn.net, info@zesn.net

Facebook: Zimbabwe Election Support Network | **Twitter:** @ZESN1