

PRESS STATEMENT

CIVIL SOCIETY JOINT STATEMENT ON OBSERVATIONS ON THE MOBILE VOTER REGISTRATION EXERCISE

Harare - 26 June 2013 - We the civil society organisations in Zimbabwe would like to commend ZEC for having rolled out the mandatory Voter registration exercise from the 9th of June 2013. As we prepare for the harmonised elections we are of the view that voter registration and inspection are essential components of an electoral cycle especially as we head toward these watershed elections. We note the 15 June SADC Special Summit on Zimbabwe resolution which directed the government of Zimbabwe to approach the constitutional court and seek an election date extension.

After having observed the first phase of the mobile voter registration, we raised concerns with ZEC over a plethora of issues which needed attention. Our view is that certain problems that bedevilled the first phase were addressed while some of the teething issues remain prevalent in the current 30 day voter registration and inspection exercises.

Since the beginning of the second phase of the voter education, registration and inspection exercise, there are issues which have consistently hampered the effectiveness of this critical exercise. Our observations as civic society organisations have unearthed the following concerns:

1. **Inadequate timeframes** – We have noted with concern the limited timeframe given to mobile voter registration, with the registration teams spending 3 days to register people in 2 – 3 wards instead of the 30 days per ward as had been promised. It has also been noted that some advertised centres that were meant to be open were closed earlier than the stipulated time. For instance, reports from Bulawayo revealed that potential registrants were turned away at Lobengula Secondary school because the ZEC officials closed the centre before the stipulated time.
2. **Exclusion** of non-state actors in the voter registration exercise. We note with concern that despite applications for accreditation to observe the mobile voter registration process, following an advert by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission inviting organisations seeking letters of permission to visit mobile voter registration sites; none of the organisations who are part of this joint statement have received a response from ZEC regarding their applications. This limits credibility and transparency of the mobile voter registration exercise, as civil society is unable to play its critical watchdog role to ensure transparency in the process.
3. **Lack of sensitivity** to vulnerable groups including people living with disabilities, pregnant and nursing mothers and the elderly. There have been no special measures observed to ease the burden of registration of vulnerable groups, in terms of separate queues or preferential treatment which has led to structural discrimination against vulnerable groups in the mobile voter registration exercise.
4. **Lack of access to information** on voter registration procedures and requirements. We have observed the lack of clarity in registration requirements, in particular, the documentation needed to

register. There is no uniformity in terms of what documentation potential voters need to be able to register, particularly proof of residence and the use of affidavits to provide this proof. Women and youth have been disproportionately affected by this as the failure to produce proof of residence has been the main reason these groups have been turned away from the voter registration centres.

5. **Slow processing of potential voters** and unprofessional conduct by voter registration officials. We have observed the long queues to register, particularly in the urban areas with voters indicating that they sometimes have to wait for up to 10 hours on all the set days per ward to be registered. There has also been no separation of voter registration and voters' roll inspection lists, and this has further slowed the process. Registration officials have also been observed shouting at and harassing potential voters. For example in Harare's Mt Pleasant suburb the process was reported to be slow because of inadequate human resource coupled with the bussing in of police officers to register.
6. **Continued disenfranchisement** of Zimbabwean citizens still classified as "aliens". We have noted varying reasons of how the so called aliens are being treated one example being of Aliens who are being referred to renounce their citizenship at a certain fee first before they register.
7. **Inadequate voter education** – ZEC has deployed only two people per ward to conduct voter education and this has compromised the reach and quality of the education provided. In addition we have noted with concern the recruitment of voter registration personnel who are known political party activists, youth officers, war veterans with known links to political parties
8. **Lack of clarity** on the role of political parties in the mobile voter registration exercise. ZEC has failed to clarify the role of political parties in the mobile voter registration exercise.

We therefore call upon ZEC to:

- (a) Immediately accredit all civic society organisations, media and political parties to observe and monitor the electoral process without undue restrictions.
- (b) Audit the Voters' Roll once the registration process is completed by the Registrar general
- (c) Make available the Updated Voters rolls before election day
- (d) Ensure that the MVR personnel stick to the ZEC manuals on voter registration to ensure uniformity in the process.
- (e) Scale up voter education to ensure comprehensive coverage of the whole country.

The following organisations have endorsed this statement;

1. Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN)
2. Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC)
3. Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA)
4. Youth Forum
5. Counselling Services Unit (CSU)
6. Centre for Community Development in Zimbabwe (CCDZ)
7. Election Resource Centre (ERC)
8. Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC)
9. National Association of Societies for the Care of the Handicapped (NASCOH)
10. Zimbabwe National Association of Students Union (ZINASU)
11. Civic Education Network Trust (CIVNET)