

ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



BALLOT UPDATE

Issue No 15: September, 2010

INTRODUCTION

The month under review saw elections remain high on the political agenda as evidenced by various media reports on Zimbabwe's readiness for elections and the subsequent instruction by President Mugabe to "budget for elections in 2011". In addition, COPAC concluded the Constitutional Reform Outreach process in most parts of the country except for Harare. Harare witnessed open violence, which was downplayed in most parts of the country during the three months. Meetings in Harare were suspended and this update provides an analysis of events that transpired during the month of September and their implications on Zimbabwe's electoral processes, democracy and governance.

The Zimbabwe Election Support Network remains dedicated to the promotion of democratic elections in Zimbabwe. In line with this objective, ZESN continues to analyse the political environment and the 45 rural constituencies that have been systematically selected. The constituencies were especially selected owing to a number of reasons including those where by-elections are long overdue, areas that experienced inordinately high levels of political violence in the 2008 elections as well as constituencies in which candidates succeeded by notably small margins. This update is informed by observations from the chosen constituencies and broadly captures national political developments in September 2010.

| ISSUE | | COMMENT |
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| COPAC | The Constitution Making Process | <p>The constitutional outreach process was concluded in most parts of the country except for Harare. The violence that characterised the process in Harare resulted in COPAC revisiting the process and coming up with strategies to ensure that remaining meetings are free of intimidation and violence. The outreach process in Harare experienced disturbances mainly in Mbare, Greystone Park and Chitungwiza to mention a few, a clear manifestation of what has been taking place in most of the constituencies around the country which COPAC did not address in spite of reports that were coming from organisations monitoring the process.</p> <p>The sad death of an MDC (T) activist who had come to air his views at Mai Musodzi Hall in Mbare reflects the violent nature of the process. It is important to note that observers noted ferrying in of people from as far as Mwenezi to attend meetings in Glen View while most of the participants in Chitungwiza were also noticed in Greystone Park by ZZZICOMP monitors. The disturbances that have been recorded during the process have to be analysed in relation to their impact on the outcome of the process. It is also important to note that while a lot of attention has been placed on numbers of citizens that have attended, attendance in meeting has not translated to genuine participation as only a few chosen voices have been heard through coaching and political party positions. Inclusivity demands conditions that allow all citizens to participate freely in constitution building processes.</p> <p>While meetings have been held in a number of provinces to date, the Zimbabwe Peace Project, Zimbabwe Election Support Network and Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights Constitution Monitoring Project (ZZZICOMP) indicated that the process has been marred with problems, some logistical and others process related. COPAC meetings to date have covered all the provinces except Harare meetings that were aborted due to violence. Notable constituencies with high levels of intimidation according to observers were Norton (Manyame), Guruve North, Mudzi North, Mudzi South, Hurungwe North, Bindura South among others. ZESN observers</p> |

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| <p>The GNU</p> | | <p>reported that people were instructed to support certain party positions particularly those in the Kariba draft, incidents of forced attendance to meetings was widespread and threats of the reincarnation of the June 2008 violence marred the process. The high presence of security personnel during outreach meetings is a concern as it impedes free participation of the citizens. The involvement of the security sector in political matters remains a source of tension and has resulted in human rights violence. ZESN advocates for the security sector to remain within their constitutional mandate of ensuring peace and security in the country.</p> <p>The Constitution making process has widened the cracks within the inclusive government. The violence that marred this process shows that Zimbabwe is not ready for elections as shown by the high levels of intolerance still prevalent. A priority should be given to a comprehensive National Healing process and the creation of a new constitutional order.</p> <p>Pronouncements by the Prime Minister Tsvangirai and President Robert Mugabe in the Inclusive Government that they had struck a deal on polls in 2011 is a clear indication that the GNU is not working. However, the agreement to accept election results is naive as it does not provide conditions on which parties can reject election results such as if the process is marred by irregularities. SADC and the AU also believe that an election will resolve the governance crisis in Zimbabwe hence they are creating a road map for elections in Zimbabwe. Among other reforms, ZESN advocates for the National Healing process to take off, ZEC needs to be well resourced in order to enhance their capacities to fully implement their mandate.</p> <p>The passing on of former Mashonaland Central Governor and Deputy Political Commissar of ZANU PF Ephraim Masawi sadly exposed the rifts in the inclusive government when it came to the awarding of the national hero status. ZESN notes that while there is an inclusive government in operation, there are some issues that are national in nature such as awarding national hero status that remain the preserve of the politburo which is an organ of ZANU PF.</p> |
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| <p>Media Reform</p> | | <p>While it is worth noting that considerable space has been opened in the print media with some new publications such as the News Day now on the streets, it is also important to note that television and radio remain closed and little is being done to open the airwaves to other players to increase media plurality . People in the rural areas rely on the public broadcasters especially the radios. Accessibility of the local papers to the majority of the population is limited.</p> <p>Local public media has not been balanced, reporting in a partisan manner. Independent radio stations and papers continue to be a reliable source of news for the citizenry. MMPZ reports that public media was dominated by ZANU PF voices especially during “Vapotsori” church gatherings cum rallies promoting their party positions. ZESN notes that state owned media adopted a minimalist attitude in reporting violence in the outreach process in Harare by labelling them “mere skirmishes”.</p> <p>ZESN acknowledges the work being done by civil society organisations such as ZLHR’s newsletter, The Legal Monitor, ZCTU’s The Worker, MMPZ’s The News Monitor, Bulawayo Agenda’s Weekly Agenda and others in providing civic education and news to the citizens. These and other newsletters have also not been very accessible to the remote parts of the country though most of them are written in English which reduces their accessibility to the generality of the population.</p> <p>ZESN notes with interest how the constitution making process outreach meetings in Harare received the attention of the media especially the radio, TV and print. It is important to note that COPAC has not provided information on progress of the outreach process they planned to do and how many they have actually done from the target of 1957 wards they intended to have meetings in.</p> |
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| <p>Human rights and fundamental freedoms</p> | | <p>ZESN observers noted with concern the resuscitation of “Bases” in parts of Mashonaland Central which are allegedly being manned by ZANU PF youths and calls on the authorities to condemn these actions as they have led to lawlessness in the past and the violation of human rights.</p> <p>ZESN observers reported that political parties were ferrying people from other wards to speak at ward meetings in different areas with the intention of diluting the views of people in that area if they are perceived to have contrary views. This is a clear violation of citizens’ right to be heard and association during the outreach process.</p> <p>ZESN observers in Norton, Mudzi South, North, Hurungwe North, Bindura South noted intimidation of citizens with dissenting views by denying them an opportunity to contribute during meetings, with threats of violence if they defy the instructions and speak during the meetings. It is important to note that genuine participation requires freedom from violence. Thus ZESN urges all political parties to have tolerance to dissenting views and accept that diversity should not be taken to mean enmity.</p> <p>ZESN is concerned about the selective application of the law and the manner in which civic organisations have been denied access to the communities as a result of denial of police clearance using flimsy reasons such as a lack of police officers to provide security at the meetings.</p> <p>ZESN envisages an environment where citizens’ freedoms of association, access to information and assembly are respected. We note that a people driven constitution denotes genuine participation as opposed to manipulation. In this regard we urge all stakeholders to uphold the rights of citizens as espoused in the bill of rights enshrined in the Zimbabwean constitution.</p> |
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