



ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK

PRESS STATEMENT

9 February 2007

ZESN CONDEMNS POLITISATION OF FOOD AID

For any election to be free and fair the electorate must be able to vote freely without being subjected to intimidation and other forms of unlawful pressure.

The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) strongly condemns the threats allegedly made by president of the Council of Chiefs, Chief Fortune Charumbira, to expel villagers who support the opposition and to withhold food aid from them. These threats are blatantly illegal.

In October 2006 Chief Charumbira reportedly told villagers in Masvingo at a function organised by the United Nations to mark World Food Day:

“The position is that only ZANU PF supporters will be allowed to reside in my area. I want my headmen to take note of this position. If you are an opposition supporter this is the time to pack your bags. I don’t know where you will go because other chiefs will take the same stance.”

Chief Charumbira’s latest threats were reportedly made early this month ahead of the Chiredzi South by-election scheduled for Saturday the 17 February 2007. They were made at a ZANU PF rally held at Chilonga Primary School in Chiredzi South, which was attended by a ZESN Officer on the 2 February 2007.

ZESN notes with utter dismay that at this rally Chief Charumbira apparently instructed chiefs to campaign for the ruling ZANU PF party, adding that as traditional leaders they were supposed to know ‘which side their bread was buttered’. He also ordered traditional leaders in rural Chiredzi South constituency to deny state supplied food aid to opposition supporters. The Chief also instructed fellow traditional leaders in the area to herd their subjects to the polling stations to ensure a victory for ZANU PF victory in the by - election.

The alleged statements by Chief Charumbira are unconstitutional, illegal and in gross violation of human rights. These statements violate the following laws and regional and international standards. The Constitution of Zimbabwe section 23 protects all citizens against discrimination on the various grounds, one of which is political opinion. It is also a serious criminal offence in terms of section 134 of the Electoral Act to use undue influence to induce or compel any person to vote or refrain from voting. The Administrative Justice Act provides in s 3 that administrative authorities have a duty to act lawfully, reasonably and in a fair manner. The SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections require political tolerance and freeness and fairness in the electoral process. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights provides in Article 24 that every citizen has the right and opportunity to have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in his country, without distinction on the ground of political opinion and without unreasonable restrictions.

Finally, in more general terms, the alleged actions on the part of Chief Charumbira undermine the efforts to achieve genuine democracy in Zimbabwe, one of the hallmarks of which is political tolerance for opposing political views.

ZESN therefore urges the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) and the relevant law enforcement agents to ensure that the laws of Zimbabwe are respected and that all players abide by the law irrespective of their political affiliation. As for this matter we ask the ZEC to counteract such threats to ensure that voters are assured of the right to make political choices freely and that their ballots will remain secret. .

The network is distressed by the fact that chiefs and headmen have abandoned political neutrality in the performance of their duties in their communities as already highlighted in our reports and statements on the Rural District Council elections of October 2006.

ZESN also condemns all political traditional leaders and other political players who are taking advantage of the current economic hardships and using food as a “vote buying” tool.

**We take this opportunity to call for a peaceful election in the Chiredzi South parliamentary by-elections.
Ends//**

PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE

FOR COMMENTS AND FURTHER DETAILS CONTACT

Zimbabwe Election Support Network

+263 (04) 250735/6 or 703956 zesn@africaonline.co.zw / info@zen.org.zw or visit www.zesn.org.zw