

ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



GAPS IN THE ELECTORAL (VOTER REGISTRATION) PROCEDURES MUST BE ADDRESSED

4 August 2017 – Harare – The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) notes the gazetting of Statutory Instrument 85 of 2017 by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) on the 21st of July 2017 in accordance with Section 192 of the Electoral Act [Chapter 2:13]. ZESN made submissions to the draft regulations on various provisions with a view of assisting ZEC to strengthen the regulations. Despite the presence of progressive provisions in the regulations, ZESN notes that there are a number of gaps that need to be addressed.

ZESN is concerned by the lack of clarity on the role of observers and political party agents in the regulations. Given that the role of observers is crucial in enhancing transparency of electoral processes, ZEC should explicitly state the role of observers and party agents rather than leaving it to the discretion of the voter registration officials.

The regulations make provision for the issuance of voter registration certificates in accordance with Section 26 of the Electoral Act. However, in previous elections there have been numerous reports of fraudulent use of the registrations slips, thus ZESN calls upon ZEC to ensure that the slips contain enhanced security features such as watermarks and security threading and make it clear that they will not be used for voting.

In its submissions to ZEC, ZESN called for the integration of technologically advanced methods that enable citizens to verify their registration status via SMS and secure online platforms. This suggestion was excluded in the regulations. ZESN believes that this innovation which has been successfully implemented in countries like Kenya and Pakistan would go a long way in ensuring easy access to voters' rolls by voters thus expediting the process of verifying registration status and personal details by registrants.

In addition ZESN has noted a number of other key gaps that need to be addressed in the regulations, some of them are listed below;

Recommendations

- i. The Regulations should ensure that readable, analyzable and up to date election information such as copies of voters' rolls are available at the finest possible level of detail and should be accessible at the polling station level to promote transparency and accountability.
- ii. Provisions should be made in the Regulations in consultation with electoral stakeholders such as electoral contestants, with regards to the establishment of voter registration centres specifying the general locations where registration centres shall be established and not established e.g. army barracks or chiefs' homesteads.
- iii. ZEC should consider adding to the regulations, provisions for the display of the provisional and final updated voters' rolls outside of registration centers and polling stations.
- iv. The Regulations should list persons allowed to be in the registration centres during the registration centres e.g. voter registration officers, members of the Commission, voter registration political party agents, duly accredited observers and media practitioners.
- v. The Electoral Regulations should clearly specify whether citizens with national identity documents with the classification 'alien' will be eligible to register.
- vi. Mechanisms should be provided for in the Regulations to ensure that prisoners, those in hospitals especially hospital staff, nurses and doctors, police, election officials and others who will be on duty on Election Day can exercise their right to vote.
- vii. The Regulations should specify how individuals who are privy to postal voting will be registered as voters.
- viii. The Regulations should provide mechanisms for the electorate to check their registration status e.g. through the integration of SMS systems into the voters' roll to enable citizens to verify their registration status via SMS or secure web based applications
- ix. The Regulations should provide for clear roles of political party agents and observers for each registration centre within the polling district for the purpose of enhancing transparency, trust, confidence and accountability in the process as well as observation of tendering and procurement processes, training of registration staff, setting up of registration centres and other key electoral processes.

ZESN is committed to the promotion of democratic electoral processes in Zimbabwe and believes that these gaps must be addressed to ensure that the voter registration process is inclusive and transparent and conforms to regional and international best practices and principles.

PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE

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