



# BALLOT e-Newsletter

ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK(ZESN)

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ELECTIONS BULLETIN

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## WE NEVER CLOSED DOORS DURING 2020 LOCKDOWN – ZEC

THE Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) has revealed it had commenced voter registration, transfers and voters' roll inspection during the last quarter of 2020 before the recent suspension of all electoral activities. The ZEC revealed this following concerns that it closed its doors to the public after President Emmerson Mnangagwa announced the initial phase of lockdown measures.

“Voter registration, transfers and voters' roll inspection commenced during the last quarter of 2020,” the ZEC said in its response posted on micro-blogging Twitter.

Voter registration is supposed to be conducted on a continuous basis in order to keep the voters' roll up to date. Only those voters who are registered and whose names appear on the voters' roll 12 days after nomination court are eligible to cast their votes in an election.

The Electoral Act stipulates that the voters' roll is a public document open to inspection by the public. Under the Act, the ZEC is mandated to provide any person who requests it with a copy of the voters' roll, upon payment of a prescribed fee not exceeding the reasonable cost of preparing the copy.

Political parties and candidates contesting the election, and every accredited observer group are also entitled to one electronic copy of every voter's roll to be used in the election, within seven days of the calling of an election and upon payment of the prescribed fees.

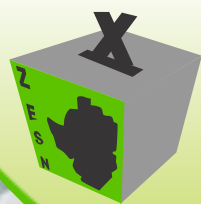
However, in reality, the accessibility of the voters' roll has been problematic. In 2000 and 2002, the opposition struggled to access the roll, which not only was costly, but copies were not provided to opposition parties in time to inspect it. For the March 2008 elections, the ZEC provided the opposition PDF copies of the roll, which made it difficult for them to conduct computer-based inspections of the register, after a court order obtained by the MDC.

Besides, civil society organisations were not granted access to the roll and the MDC complained about its manipulation.

The provision of the voter's roll was also a bone of contention during the 2013 and 2018 elections, though with an improvement in 2018 as it was availed after nomination. However, parties and candidates in particular, were not able to check the presence on the roll of those who nominated them, among other things.

*Political parties and candidates contesting the election, and every accredited observer group are also entitled to one electronic copy of every voters' roll to be used in the election*





# ZEC SUSPENDS ALL ELECTORAL ACTIVITIES

THE Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) suspended all electoral activities following the announcement of a 30-day lockdown by the Vice-President of the Republic of Zimbabwe who is also Health and Child Care Minister Retired General Dr Constantino Chiwenga on January 2.

Health Minister Chiwenga moved Zimbabwe back to Level 4 from Level 2 of the national COVID-19 lockdown following a surge in confirmed cases and deaths during the festive season. Under the new measures contained in Statutory Instrument 10 of 2021, Public Health (COVID-19 Prevention, Containment and Treatment), restaurants, bars, bottle stores are closed while public gatherings of more than two people are prohibited.

This means there cannot be gatherings for public worship, for public hearings such as those conducted by Parliamentary Committees and for sports events.

ZEC Chief Elections Officer Utoile Silaigwana in a statement said the electoral body was also suspending all electoral activities following the promulgation of the Statutory Instrument on new lockdown measures.

“In response to the announcement by the Minister of Health and Child Care for the nation to adopt stringent national COVID-19 lockdown measures and the sub-sequent promulgation of Statutory Instrument 10 of 2021, the ZEC wishes to announce that it is suspending with immediate effect all electoral activities which bring groups of people together until further notice,” Silaigwana said.

This means voter registration, education and by-elections among other processes in the electoral cycle remain suspended. “However, the filling of Proportional Representation seats will continue as this exercise does not put the health of those involved at risk. A skeletal staff will keep the Commissions' offices open under strict COVID-19 health measures,” Silaigwana added.

Senators elected on the party lists and 60 women Members of the National Assembly elected by Proportional Representation are chosen by political parties in proportion to the votes received by their candidates in the constituency elections to the National Assembly.

A number of National Assembly seats are vacant following the recalling of MDC Alliance legislators by then MDC-T President Thokozani Khupe last year. By-elections to fill the vacant seats were initially pencilled for December 2020 before they were indefinitely suspended on account of COVID-19.

*Health Minister Chiwenga moved Zimbabwe back to Level 4 from Level 2 of the national COVID-19 lockdown following a surge in confirmed cases and deaths during the festive season.*

## #stayhome but don't forget...

Political parties should embrace principles of inclusivity, non-violence and conflict sensitivity before, during and after elections



PROMOTING  
**DEMOCRATIC  
ELECTIONS**  
IN ZIMBABWE

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## BY-ELECTIONS COULD STILL BE HELD SAFELY AMID COVID-19

Former Speaker of Parliament Lovemore Moyo has called on the government to lift the suspension of elections over COVID-19 fears as he argued it is naïve to do so without scientific knowledge on the lifespan of the pandemic.

All electoral activities have been suspended following the announcement of a 30-day Level 4 lockdown by Vice President and Health and Child Care Minister Dr Constantino Chiwenga on January 2.

This is not the first time that elections have been suspended over COVID-19. In October 2020, Health Minister Dr Chiwenga, in an announcement contained in Statutory Instrument 255 suspended by-elections to fill vacant seats in Parliament and local government following the recalling of MDC Alliance legislators and councillors.

Moyo argued suspending elections was not sustainable as he called for a need to 'balance between the conduct of elections and Covid-19 restrictions.'

“The ZEC and government must put measures that will allow our democratic systems to continue to function without putting the lives of the people at risk of being infected by COVID-19 disease,” the former Speaker of Parliament said in an interview.

He added: “The bigger challenge is that there is no scientific knowledge about the life span of the pandemic, therefore, it will be naïve to base our democratic processes on the COVID-19 disease which we don't know when it will disappear or be permanently contained.”

A number of African countries such as Malawi, and recently Uganda have held elections in the face of COVID-19.

Moyo urged the government and the ZEC to learn from other countries as “elections are a constitutional function” and their “suspension will be in violation of the constitution of Zimbabwe.”

“An indefinite suspension of elections can never resolve the intricacies associated with the pandemic, therefore, an alternative elections strategy must be found,” Moyo argued.

“Further, the suspension of elections will perpetuate dictatorship and promote undemocratic characteristics by the incumbent government. The ZEC and government must explore other election management strategies employed by other countries which may reduce people contacts and enable social distancing.”

*A number of African countries such as Malawi, and recently Uganda have held elections in the face of COVID-19.*



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### Civic & Voter education must be intensified in between elections

1. Before putting on a mask, clean hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.
2. Cover mouth and nose with mask and make sure there are no gaps between your face and the mask.
3. Avoid touching the mask while using it; if you do, clean your hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap.
4. Replace the mask with a new one as soon as it is damp.
5. To remove the mask: remove it from behind (do not touch the front of mask).
6. Discard immediately in a closed bin; clean hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.

**PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE**



## COVID-19:- "AN IMPEDIMENT TO WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN DEMOCRATIC ELECTORAL PROCESSES in 2020."

The year 2020 was an unprecedented year, with the world reeling from many natural disasters and many in need of food aid and the COVID-19 pandemic added a huge burden to an already ailing humanity. The marginalised within society mainly women, youth and people living with disabilities have further felt the brunt of the pandemic. Governments world over responded to the COVID-19 pandemic with imposition of lockdowns and other social distancing mechanisms to curb the spread of the disease. While these were very much needed they exacerbated the changes that marginalised groups faced in day to day living.

2020 weekly and monthly reports from the ZESN observers and network members noted that the number of reported cases of domestic violence escalated in Zimbabwe by about 60%. Women who carry the burden of unpaid care work found themselves, unable to work, as most are in informal employment, with children and the elderly to care for. Furthermore, the burden to take care of the sick also primarily rests on women, therefore lockdowns added responsibilities on women within the home with very little resources to take their loved ones to hospitals and clinics.

With socio- economic challenges magnified, democratic processes cease to be a priority for women, who have other responsibilities that they have to take care of. The Registrar General's office had been closed since March and those women who wanted any documentation have had to wait, and some are still waiting. In addition freedom of movement and association was limited since transport was not readily available to ferry them to certain distances, for example some failed to attend public hearings on the Constitutional Amendment Bill No.2 held in June 2020.

Governance processes were moved online, however most women could not afford the data to participate, for example various councils advised that they would do budget consultations via WhatsApp groups. Women's voices and priorities were excluded in the budgeting since a huge constituency of women were alienated from the discussions. Other than the cost of data to participate in online meetings and discussions, some women complained that they faced more violence in the cyber space because it is unregulated.

*Women who carry the burden of unpaid care work found themselves, unable to work, as most are in informal employment, with children and the elderly to care for.*

*For comments:*

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