
ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



PRELIMINARY STATEMENT: MUDZI WEST PARLIAMENTARY BY-ELECTION

Harare - 25 July 2015 – The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) as part of its watchdog role in electoral processes observed the Mudzi West parliamentary by-election held on the 24th of July 2015. The parliamentary constituency seat fell vacant following the death of former MP Mrs Aqualinah Katsande who passed away on 28 March 2015.

Observation Methodology

The Network deployed 6 short term observers for the by-election comprising static observers based at some of the Ward and Constituency Collation Centres. In addition 7 mobile observers were deployed and this preliminary statement is informed by their observations. ZESN's observation efforts conform to the Electoral Laws of Zimbabwe.

Opening and Setup, Voting and Counting Procedures

In polling stations where ZESN observers were deployed, opening and setup procedures were successfully completed on time. Observers reported that all polling stations had all the required voting materials such as ballot boxes, ballot papers, ZEC official stamp, indelible ink and the voters' roll at the time of opening. All polling stations covered by ZESN observers had adequate polling personnel with an average of 6 per polling station. ZESN observer reports show that the process was generally, peaceful and smooth with no major incidents reported.

Counting

At all polling stations where ZESN observed closing of polls and counting, the processes took place according to procedures and results were displayed outside the polling stations. At all the ward collation Centres and the constituency collation centre where ZESN observed, all party agents signed the V11 form thus agreeing that the process had been conducted well.

Assisted voters and turned away voters

ZESN observers indicate that there are significant numbers of voters who have been assisted to vote. By close of polls, ZESN noted that an average of 25 voters was assisted at each polling station visited by mobile observers and the majority were illiterate. Disturbing figures were observed at Tsakare Primary School ward 4 and Chipfuri Primary School ward 5 where our mobile observers reported that 38 and 52 voters had been assisted by 1308hrs

and 1542hrs respectively. Furthermore, ZESN noted that some of the reasons for turned away voters were, some voters had no identity documents while some were bringing the wrong identity documents and others were not appearing on the voters' rolls.

Voter Education

ZESN noted with concern that voters continue to be turned away in elections, an issue that could have easily been addressed by a comprehensive voter education programme. This observation is of concern given that voter education for the by-election was conducted. This therefore raises questions on the voter education methodologies employed, the reach and the timeframe allotted to the process.

Political Party Agents

It is regrettable that at most polling stations where ZESN observed only ZANU PF had deployed election agents. ZESN notes that the failure by the other contesting candidate to deploy agents is unfortunate given that the presence of election agents is not only crucial in enhancing the transparency of the electoral process but provides candidates with a basis for informed calls for reforms to electoral processes. The role of party agents is provided for in the Electoral Law therefore political parties are encouraged to take full advantage of the provision.

Police presence

ZESN has repeatedly observed that police officers are actively involved in the election process especially in assisting voters. ZESN reiterates its position on police presence and roles inside the polling stations which goes against international best norms and standards. ZESN calls for the role of the police to be limited to maintaining law and order.

Data disaggregation

ZESN continues to observe the compilation of disaggregated data by age and gender and commends ZEC for collecting such crucial data that can inform voter education programmes and other electoral processes.

Recommendations;

- ZESN therefore calls for a continuous rather than the current periodic voter education for by-elections being provided by ZEC and electoral stakeholders to ensure that all potential voters are reached. In addition, ZEC should invest in more comprehensive voter education programmes to improve voters understanding of key electoral requirements.
- ZEC should work with civic society organisations to ensure that voter education programmes and voter information content dispel fears of intimidation and

retribution that might be one of the major reasons for assisted voters in the elections.

- ZEC should avail to relevant stakeholders disaggregated data by age and gender recorded during polling in order to inform their electoral programmes such as voter education and campaigns.
- Contesting political parties must ensure comprehensive deployment of political party agents to ensure informed advocacy interventions for electoral reforms.
- ZESN reiterates previous calls on the role of the police that it should be limited to maintaining law and order within the vicinity of the polling stations.

Conclusion

ZESN continues to note the recurring gaps and inadequacies in the legal framework of elections. The Network therefore reiterates that electoral reforms still remain a priority in promoting credible elections. ZESN implores political parties, government and parliament to speed up the harmonisation of the Electoral Laws to the Constitution and the need for political will to fully implement the electoral provisions as Zimbabwe prepares for the 2018 elections.

PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE

FOR COMMENTS AND FURTHER DETAILS CONTACT Zimbabwe Election Support Network ZESN

Chairperson: +263778379104 ZESN Director: +263712415902

+263 (04) 791443, 798193, 791803, 250736

zesn@africaonline.co.zw / info@zesn.org.zw or visit www.zesn.org.zw

ZESN conducts its observation efforts in conformity with the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections, the Declaration of Global Principles for Citizen Election Observation and Monitoring which was launched at the United Nations on 03 April 2012 as well as the Principles for Election Management, Monitoring and Observation in the SADC Region (PEMMO).

ZESN is a member of:

- Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors (GNDEM)
- Southern African Development Community Election Support Network (SADC-ESN)
- CIVICUS
- Observer status with AU African Commission