



DELIMITATION, A CRITICAL ELECTORAL PROCESS

THE Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) has again pleaded with the public to register to vote to avoid having their constituencies cut in the next delimitation exercise. Zimbabwe awaits the next delimitation exercise, also called the creation of new constituencies, ahead of the next general elections.

The last delimitation exercise was done ahead of the 2008 elections in terms of the old constitution and based on the Registrar-Generals' voters roll. ZEC Bulawayo provincial elections officer Innocent Ncube pleaded with the media to raise awareness on the importance of registering to vote ahead of the next delimitation exercise.

"Our message to the media is very clear; tell them to register in their numbers because the number of Constituencies in a Province are determined by the number of registered voters," Ncube said in an interview.

"The formula is straight forward. It is: Total registered nationally divided by 210 Constituencies and that gives an average per Constituency. 20% up or down the average, gives the acceptable upper and lower limit of the range.

"Anything less than the lower limit, is not a Constituency. So, the message is: Register in numbers to retain the number of constituencies or to add new ones."

Government gazetted the Census and Statistics Amendment Bill of 2020 in June which seeks to amend the Census and Statistics Act (Chapter 10:29) to allow for the delimitation exercise to be conducted well before the 2023 polls. The Bill seeks to ensure that the delimitation exercise - creation of new electoral boundaries – is conducted using census statistics as required by section 161 (1) of the Constitution and not the voters' roll as has been the case.

This will afford ZEC ample time to delimit electoral boundaries in accordance with census data. The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) has argued that the amendment of the Census and Statistics Act is necessary given that current electoral boundaries are no longer representative of the voters with the last delimitation exercise conducted in 2008.

"The amendment of the Census and Statistics Act is consistent with calls by ZESN for the census to be moved forward to address concerns around the process of delimiting electoral boundaries instead of delinking the delimitation exercise from the population census," said ZESN Chairperson Mr. Andrew Makoni recently.

#Zwdemocracymatters

#liftbyelectionssuspension

#wewantbyelections

#Citizenvoice

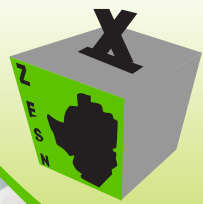
#Yes2byelections

#ElectionsMatter

#dontquarantinedemocracy



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JOINT CIVIC SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS' STATEMENT ON THE SUSPENSION OF BY- ELECTIONS

Following the indefinite suspension of the holding of by-elections in Zimbabwe due to the surge in COVID-19 cases by the Minister of Health and Child Care who is also the Vice President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, Retired Army Chief Constantino Chiwenga, institutions working on promoting democracy in Zimbabwe joined hands and drafted the following the Statement:

We, the undersigned Civic Society Organizations, working on democracy and human rights, guided by the Constitution that allows all citizens to participate freely in politics, express our concern over the recent developments in Zimbabwe that pose a threat to such participation. Of note is the recent suspension of by-elections through Statutory Instrument 225A of 2020. This constitutes a blanket ban on by-elections in Zimbabwe. We demand that by-elections in Zimbabwe be guided by the Constitution and call for the upholding of the rule of law.

The suspension of by-elections by the Ministry of Health and Child Care comes after the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission had undertaken a consultative process to develop COVID-19 Guidelines for the conduct of by-elections in the country. The Ministry of Health and Child Care has provided guidance on the resumption of a wide-array of socio-economic processes and activities, including but not limited to the reopening of land and air borders, the resumption of the education sector, the expansion of food markets, and the extension of retailers and industry operating hours. The blanket ban of by-elections accordingly appears to be unique limitation on electoral activities.

Citizens should be allowed to express themselves politically without restraint or compulsion from anyone or any political party. Political participation is one of the cornerstones of a constitutional democracy which facilitates discussion on politics, running for office and electing candidates of one's choice into political positions in local authorities, Parliament or the Presidium. It means to do so freely according to one's preference. Section 67(1) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe states that; every Zimbabwean citizen has the right;

- (a) To free, fair and regular elections for such elective public office established in terms of the Constitution or any other law,**
- (b) To make political choices freely,**

As civic society organizations, we reiterate our position that the electoral process must remain guided by the Constitution and adhere to all tenets of democracy enshrined in it that include, the right to vote for a candidate of their choice into Parliament and Local Government. Communities in Zimbabwe are constitutionally represented, in key national platforms and processes, by their elected representatives in Parliament and Local Government. Therefore, the ban on by-elections effectively and unacceptably erodes the right to representative democracy for 35 parliamentary communities and 55 wards.

We do not condone actions that seek to undercut constitutional principles on freedom of expression, good electoral processes and that quarantine democracy by removing procedures that are critical components in the meaningful democratic participation of citizens in the election of Members of Parliament and Councillors in Local Government. The same Constitution allows citizens to either support or challenge policies of Government peacefully.

We implore the Government of Zimbabwe to create inclusive multi-stakeholder spaces for ongoing dialogue and collaboration, which will lead to the holding of COVID-19 compliant by-elections, to enable citizens to peacefully exercise their constitutionally enshrined political rights. Government should desist from enacting statutory instruments that undermine the spirit and letter of the Constitution. Dialogue and collaboration should be multifaceted. Engagement mechanisms must be institutionalized for the provision of long-term input from non-state actors.

We urge the people of Zimbabwe to remain peaceful in the exercise of their civil and political rights provided in the Constitution. We reiterate our position that there is need to strike a balance between national health emergency responses and the respect of the supreme law of the land. The suspension of by-elections closes up what is left of the shrinking democratic space and undermines the civil and political entitlements of citizens.

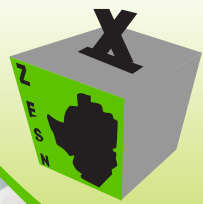
Peaceful challenges and/or public criticism of Government policies that are inconsistent with the Constitution by anyone acting alone or in a group are constitutionally protected rights. The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission is constitutionally charged to be an independent institution supporting democracy.

Accordingly, in our view, the Ministry of Health and Child Care has overreached and has unduly limited fundamental rights and freedoms enshrined in the Constitution. We believe that the suspension of by-elections should have been a result of transparent multi-stakeholder consultations inclusive of voices from citizens, parliament, political parties, the academia, civil society, the private sector, trade unions, youths and Persons with Disabilities to ensure the fostering of trust in electoral processes so as not to further curtail the upholding of democracy in Zimbabwe.

In the context of the pandemic, multitudes of African countries conducted or intend to conduct COVID-19 compliant presidential elections. Such countries include Malawi, Zambia, South Africa, Guinea, Cameroon, Mali, Benin, Burundi and Ghana that conducted Biometric Voter Registration of 15 million voters in May. Yet, Zimbabwe, whose COVID-19 case-load is not in any way unique on the African continent, proceeds to ban by-elections indefinitely, which appears not to be informed by any COVID-19 science.

The Statement was Endorsed by:

Election Resource Centre (ERC), Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WcOZ), Female Prisoners Support Trust (FEMPRIST), Girls and Women Empowerment Network (GWEN), Habakkuk Trust, Imba Mukadzi Umuzi Ngumama Trust (IMUNT), Marondera Residents Open Forum (MAROF), Media Alliance of Zimbabwe (MAZ), National Association of Youth Organizations (NAYO), Women's Action Group (WAG), Wedza Residents Development Initiative Trust (WERDIT), Women and Law in Southern Africa (WILSA), Women in Politics Support Unit (WiPSU), Women's Academy for Leadership and Political Excellence (WALPE), Women's Coalition in Zimbabwe, Women's Institute for Leadership Development (WILD), Youth Empowerment and Transformation Trust (YETT), Zimbabwe Civil Education Trust (ZIMCET), Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN), Zimbabwe Empowerment for Development (ZIMED), Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR), Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP), Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association (ZWLA) and Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU).



Elections Under COVID-19

In reaction to the suspension of elections, observers argued that suspending elections can never be an option whatsoever the circumstances.

HUMAN rights activists have called on the government to lift the suspension on the holding of elections over COVID-19 arguing "a constitutional democracy cannot exist outside elections." Vice President Constantino Chiwenga recently issued Statutory Instrument 225A of 2020 indefinitely suspending elections citing the COVID-19 scare. The country was set to hold by-elections in December following the recall of MDC Alliance parliamentarians and councillors by the Thokozani Khupe-led MDC.

In reaction to the suspension of elections, observers argued that suspending elections can never be an option whatsoever the circumstances. "In countries where they are heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, they are still holding elections. We can do the same in Zimbabwe despite the fact that we are also affected by the COVID-19," said Effie Ncube, the Communications Officer of Citizens COVID-19 monitor, a citizens' led initiative to fight the pandemic.

Tanzania and America recently held elections despite the COVID-19 scare. "A constitutional democracy cannot exist outside elections. Elections are very important in Constitutional democracy. There is no justification to postpone elections indefinitely, our conditions allow us to hold elections if we want," Ncube added.

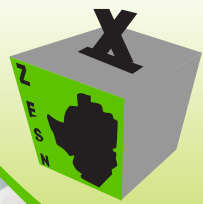
In October, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) announced that it is developing election observation guidelines in the face of COVID-19 to address the potential risk of spreading the virus during elections.



While the government insists on an election ban, SADC guidelines are envisaged to provide elaborate mitigation measures and steps on how to manage and observe elections amidst pandemics with relative safety.

The draft guidelines were considered by the Ministerial Committee of the Organ (MCO) during its extraordinary virtual meeting held on September, 15 2020, a statement from the SADC reads in part.





VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IMPEDES THEIR PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

ABUSE of women in politics through vices such as name calling and physical violence has been cited as the reason why they are forced to shy away from active politics.

Women constitute more than half the world's population, yet their participation in electoral and governance processes – where decisions regarding their lives are made – remains peripheral in many countries, and Zimbabwe is no different in this global trend.

In separate interviews, women in politics said they face persistent barriers despite gains driven by the country's gender quota. Bulawayo Ward 16 Councillor Sikhululekile Moyo said the situation was even worse when one was a single mother.

"It puts us off especially when it comes to single mothers. They turn to use that against us saying that what she could tell us if she is unmarried. They do not even listen to you," said Moyo.

Better Life Foundation, Coaching and Mentor Ogra Nkala said there was too much labelling and stereotyping of women who wished to venture into active politics.

"There is too much labelling and some of them are even regarded as immoral women 'mahure'. When you want to pursue the governance careers you will be labelled as one, hence you find that in many processes like budget consultation women usually don't get involved that much," said Nkala.

"Basing on our background that is patriarchal, our society has created policies that have seen women who are not empowered losing interest in participating in the public sphere."

Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC) commissioner Susan Makore weighed in saying the media was also to blame in the way they covered women in politics.

***"There is too much labelling
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"Research has shown that women's participation is one of the most problematic issues as women are often under-represented and sometimes misrepresented," Makore told journalists in her presentation during a three-day Gender Links-organised women in politics training workshop held in Harare on Wednesday.

"Can we look at how we can lessen those barriers that are preventing them from wanting to be interviewed, or being profiled in newspapers because they believe they are always misrepresented; there is a general belief that there tends to be more focus on the negativity, and controversy." Zimbabwe's new Constitution came into effect in 2013, and provides a quota of 60 seats set aside for women for proportional representation in Parliament, increasing the number of women in Parliament from 16% to 34%.

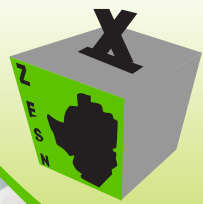
**STOP
GENDER BASED
VIOLENCE**

Violence against women threatens
democracy as it reduces
their participation
and representation in
elections and governance



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PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE



MEDIA SHOULD PLAY ITS ROLE IN PROMOTING ELECTORAL AWARENESS

THE media has been highlighted as having a critical role in raising awareness on electoral processes to promote good governance and democracy.

Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA)-Zimbabwe board member Pamenus Tusso said the media play an indispensable role in the proper functioning of a democracy.

"The media also have other roles in enabling full public participation in elections by scrutinizing the electoral process itself, including electoral management, in order to evaluate the fairness of the process, its efficiency, and its probity," Tusso said in an interview.

Tusso urged the media not to ignore the upcoming delimitation exercise as it has a bearing on all electoral processes.

The last delimitation exercise was marred by reports of bias in favour of the ruling Zanu PF to ostensibly disenfranchise opposition parties.

"As such, the media play an indispensable role in the proper functioning of a democracy particularly now as another delimitation exercise is coming," Tusso added.

A 2019 article titled Media for Democracy Journalism and Elections in Times of Disinformation says "Free, independent and professional journalism - both online and offline - serves an essential role in democracies.

"It provides information that allows citizens to make informed decisions inside and outside the voting booth. Journalism can also contribute to the electoral agenda by requiring politicians to respond to the public, and to focus on subjects of real public interest," the report reads.

The report adds that the media also has a major role to play in conflict resolution mechanisms and ensuring peace post disputed elections.

"In reconciliation processes, conflict-sensitive journalism can play a pivotal role. It can bridge divides through accurate reporting, break down stereotypes, cover human stories and present solutions. Such journalism can help prevent polarization, violence and war."

Journalism can also contribute to the electoral agenda by requiring politicians to respond to the public...



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