

ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



Press Statement

ZESN STATEMENT ON CENSUS DATES AND DELIMITATION

11 June 2021- The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) expresses concern over the new dates that have been set by the government for the conducting of the population census and delimitation exercise. The new dates were announced in the latest post Cabinet press briefing, in which the government indicated that the country remains on course to conduct the Census within the prescribed time frame for the 2023 Elections. The actual population census commencing in April 2022, and the results expected in August 2022, paving way for the Constituencies Delimitation in October 2022 (31 December 2022 being the last day allowed for delimitation).

This comes at a time when CSOs are pushing for electoral reforms before the next election, and delimitation being one of the key reforms in the electoral cycle with a bearing on the credibility of electoral outcomes. The dates for the Delimitation Exercise are aligning with what is prescribed under Section 161 (1) of the Constitution on Delimitation of Electoral Boundaries; which provides that; *“Once every ten years, on a date or within a period fixed by the Commission so as to fall as soon as possible after a population census, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission must conduct a delimitation of the electoral boundaries into which Zimbabwe is to be divided.”*

However, ZESN is irked by the provision under Section 161 (2) which postulates that: *“If a delimitation of electoral boundaries is completed less than six months before polling day in a general election, the boundaries so delimited do not apply to that election, and instead the boundaries that existed immediately before the delimitation are applicable.”* The Network fears that the census will provide a useful resultant dataset in the delimitation exercise which could help in improving the integrity of the delimitation exercise; however, the time allocated to the delimitation exercise process may not accord ZEC to use redrawn boundaries in the next election.

Assuming that the next general election as provided for in the Constitution under Section 143 on Duration and Dissolution of Parliament, the Network is concerned that timelines are likely to compromise the process in terms of the quality. (Parliament is elected for a five year term which runs from the date on which the President elect is sworn in and assumes office in terms of Section 94 (1) (a), and parliament stands dissolved at midnight on the day before the first polling day in the next general election called in terms of Section 144.)

Taking into account that the current electoral boundaries are arguably no longer representative of the voters with the last delimitation exercise conducted in 2008, ZESN urges the government to give ZEC ample time to conduct a thorough and quality process so that new electoral boundaries can be used in the next election.

There is a need to accord the opportunity to build its confidence, trust through engagement of citizens and key electoral stakeholders; given the fact that the timelines are too tight, the process is not clear on what can be done now given the absence of the boundary delimitation calendar makes it difficult for stakeholders to plan accordingly as well as contribute to the process. //ENDS

PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE

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