



Press Statement

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT ON THE UMZINGWANE RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL, WARD 15 BY-ELECTION

7 October 2024 - In line with its mission to promote democratic free and fair electoral processes through objectively and impartially observing elections in Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) observed the Ward 15 by-election in Umzingwane District, Matabeleland South. Ward 15 is a new Ward that was formed during the 2023 delimitation process. The by-election was held following the death of Councillor Handsome Sibanda.

Legal Framework

The by-election was held under Sections 50 and 121A of the Electoral Act (Chapter 2:13) for the National Assembly and Local Authority Councillors following the passing on of the incumbent Councillor.

Nomination Court for the by-elections sat on 5 September 2024 at Umzingwane Rural District Council's Offices. The three (3) candidates who submitted their nomination papers, successfully met the Nomination Court's requirements. The candidates' names were Sifelani Dube of the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), Sanele Ndlovu (Independent) and Victor Phiri of the Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC).

Observation Methodology

ZESN trained and deployed five (5) observers to track polling day procedures including polling station set-up, opening, voting, counting and results announcement.

The findings and recommendations of this preliminary statement are made in reference to the Electoral Laws of Zimbabwe, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Principles and Guidelines Governing the Conduct of Democratic Elections and other regional and African election guidelines and principles. This preliminary statement is based on reports received from the accredited ZESN observers.

Pre-election Observations

ZESN observers reported that the campaign period was relatively peaceful with no incidents. The environment allowed for electoral contestants across the political divide to canvass for votes. The ZANU-PF party had the most visible campaigns which included the holding of rallies and meetings which were addressed by party leaders including members of parliament of some of the constituencies in the province.

Set up and opening of polling stations

Before the setting up of polling stations, voters' rolls were displayed outside to enable the electorate to check their names, a good practice from the ZEC that serves to lessen the number of redirected and turned-away voters on polling day. ZESN observers reported that at the polling stations observed, the stations opened on time with all the essential polling materials such as ballot boxes, ballot papers, indelible finger markers, voters' rolls and the ZEC official stamps available.

Political parties' agents

Observers reports indicate that all 3 candidates deployed their agents comprehensively at the observed polling stations. This is commendable as it allows for the candidates to authoritatively comment on the polling process.

Polling officials, Voting process and procedures

On average, each polling station was staffed by six (6) polling officers. ZESN observers noted that many polling stations had male presiding officers. However, there was balanced gender parity with regards to polling officers deployed. Polling procedures were duly followed in accordance with the law, for example, checking voters' names on the voters' roll and checking their fingers for ink before they could be allowed to vote. Ballot papers were stamped with an official ZEC stamp before being issued to voters.

Assisted Voters

Assisted voting on account of illiteracy and visual impairment was mostly done by polling officials in the presence of the police in line with Section 59 of the Electoral Act on voting by illiterate or persons with disabilities.

The highest number of assisted voters was recorded at Matshetshe Primary School where 19 people were assisted (14 females and 5 Males). The other three (3) polling stations where ZESN had observers, no voters requested to be assisted, while at Esigodini Primary School one (1) voter asked for assistance.

Redirected and turned away voters

The number of redirected voters was very-low, for instance, at Matshetshe Primary School, ZESN observer reported that one (1) person was redirected, while there were no redirected voters at the other polling stations where ZESN had observers. The highest numbers of turned-away voters were observed at Matshetshe and Carlisle Primary Schools, where 20 people (12 males and 8 Females), and 15 people (7 males and 8 females) were turned away. The reason for being turned away included showing up at the polling station without a national identity card, bringing a drivers' license, bring a photocopy of their identity card and expired passports.

By-Election Results

The official results announced by the ZEC indicate that ZANU-PF party won the by-election. The results for the Ward were as follows Sifelani Dube (ZANU-PF) received, 516 votes,

while Sabelo Ndlovu (independent) received 48 votes, and Victor Phiri (CCC) received 40 votes. The Ward was previous won by the CCC party during the 2023 Harmonised Elections.

The turnout of the by-election stood at 38.64%. Ward 15 has 1,563 registered voters.

Conclusion and Recommendation

ZESN applauds the contestants of the by-election for campaigning peacefully. ZESN continues to urge voters to participate in municipal by-elections as the Councillors influence the quality of services that municipalities can deliver.

FOR COMMENTS AND FURTHER DETAILS CONTACT

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