



Press Statement

CSOs CALL FOR COMPREHENSIVE ELECTORAL REFORMS

Harare 1 July 2015: The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) and the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR) convened a CSOs workshop on the 24th of June 2015 in Harare to build consensus on electoral reforms. The participating CSOs called for key electoral reforms ahead of the 2018 harmonised elections.

Having noted the piecemeal approach to reforms and the prevailing political environment in Zimbabwe that does not guarantee credible electoral processes and outcomes, we reiterate the need for comprehensive reforms to the electoral framework to ensure that critical institutions whose mandates impact on the delivery of democratic elections are reformed and capacitated. Our call for reforms is aimed at four broad areas namely; the electoral administration and operations, political environment, the electoral architecture and the media.

Electoral administration and Operations

i. Voter registration

We emphasize the need for reforms to the voter registration model currently in use in Zimbabwe and call for the adoption of bio-metric voter registration methodologies and other electoral technologies. We note that the current legislation on voter registration has in the past disenfranchised significant number of voters and therefore call for reforms to the current legislation to ensure that the legal framework allows for **ALL** eligible voters to be registered.

ii. Voter education

We call upon ZEC to ensure that civic actors become vital players in conducting voter education and for the repealing of the current restrictive demands for funding of voter education. We believe that ZEC should have the sole responsibility to conduct voter information which is done once proclamation for an election is made whilst leaving voter education open to other electoral stakeholders including civic society organisations.

iii. ZEC Operations

ZEC should be given the sole mandate to administer all election related functions such as voter registration and inviting foreign observers which is currently the responsibility of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In addition, capacity building and adequate and timely resourcing of ZEC are critical components



to the success of electoral process which the government must prioritize before the 2018 Harmonised elections.

Political environment

We implore the government to urgently put in place mechanisms and legal reforms to address issues of voter intimidation, violence, and hate speech, vote buying and inability of opposition parties and candidates to freely campaign.

In addition, we urge political actors to be more transparent and accountable especially regarding the issue of campaign political party finance and to ensure that the rule of law, intra party democracy and ZEC code of conduct are respected and upheld and that law enforcement agencies impartially conduct their mandate for the creation of an even playing field. We further recommend that the role of the security sector in elections be limited to maintaining peace, law and order.

Media reform

We call for the repealing of legislation that is inimical to the total enjoyment of press freedoms and access to information and for legislation that curtails hate speech, media bias and polarisation to be put in place. Furthermore, the licensing of more private radio, television stations and newspapers is essential for more guarantees to freedom of the press and of expression. ZEC should be capacitated to enforce the media code of conduct for media houses during elections and be given powers to sanction polarized, biased coverage of political parties and candidates.

Electoral architecture

We reiterate our calls for the need to fully align electoral related laws with the new constitution and ensuring adherence to principles of constitutionalism. The government must review repressive laws such as the POSA to ensure that civil and political rights of citizens are not infringed upon. Furthermore, we call for the strengthening and adequate resourcing of the electoral court and review of the current position on delimitation of constituencies given the dynamics of demographics in the country.

We call upon the government to demonstrate political will in implementing comprehensive electoral reforms before the 2018 Harmonised Elections.

ZESN and ZLHR will continue to support and advocate for the creation of a more conducive environment for the holding of democratic elections in Zimbabwe. **//End//**

For comments and further details please contact the ZESN Chair (ZLHR Director) +263778379104 and ZESN Director +263712415902