

Press Release

ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



**PRELIMINARY STATEMENT ON THE CHIMANIMANI WEST
PARLIAMENTARY BY-ELECTION**

Harare – 28 November 2016 - The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) deployed 17 mobile and static observers to the National Assembly by-election in Chimanimani West. The static observers were stationed at the eleven (11) ward collation centres, whilst the mobile teams were roving around the Constituency assessing the political environment outside the polling stations.

The by-election was held in accordance with Section 129(1)(k) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe that provides for the tenure of seat of a Member of Parliament (MP).

Observation Methodology

ZESN's election observation methodology is designed to measure the compliance of election processes with the Constitution, the Electoral Act as well as regional and international standards and principles governing the conduct of elections. ZESN election observation efforts conform to the Declaration of Global Principles for Citizen Election Observation and Monitoring which was launched at the United Nations on 3 April 2012 as well as the Principles for Election Management, Monitoring and Observation in the SADC Region (PEMMO). The findings of ZESN's election observation are measured against domestic laws, sub-regional and continental election standards.

Redirected, turned away and assisted voters

There were a significant number of voters who were turned away for various reasons. Some wanted to vote at the wrong polling station, did not have appropriate identity documents, or were not appearing on the voters' rolls. Those who turned up at the wrong polling stations were redirected to the correct polling stations. For instance, at Matendeudze Primary School by 1600 hours at least 22 had been redirected and 21 had been turned away At Mutambara Reserve Primary School by 1400 hours 39 had been redirected, 20 assisted and 21 turned

away. Furthermore, ZESN observed that the distances voters had to travel to the redirected polling stations were significantly long and could have discouraged many voters. A number of voters were redirected from Nyamusundu Primary School to Biriiri Primary in Ward 17 which is about 5 kilometres away. ZESN is concerned by these significant numbers of voters who continue to be redirected especially in rural wards/constituencies where polling stations are much further apart as compared to urban areas.

Polling Procedures and Conduct of ZEC Polling Staff

At polling stations where ZESN observers were stationed, the set up and opening procedures were completed on time and according to provisions of the Law. In addition, observer reports revealed that all polling stations had all the required voting material such as ballot boxes, ballot papers, ZEC official stamp, indelible ink, marker pens and the ‘voters’ roll at the time of opening. There was an average of six (6) polling officials at polling stations covered by ZESN observers whose conduct was professional and commendable.

Voting and Counting Procedures

At polling station where ZESN had observers, voting went on smoothly with no major incidents reported in polling stations during voting. The counting process was also reported to be generally calm. Observers did not report any incidents. There was consensus amongst political party agents who were present that the process had gone well as they all signed the V11 forms without reservations.

Voter Intimidation

On election day, ZESN received reports of voter intimidation by alleged ZANU PF officials who were recording voters’ names outside polling stations after voting. These reports were received from a significant number of Wards in the Constituency namely 5, 6, 8, 17 and 20. For instance, at Tonhorai Primary School in Ward 20, Shinja Primary School in Ward 6 and at Biriiri Primary School voters’ names were being recorded. ZESN continues to observe a trend of recording of names and details of voters in by-elections. A similar trend was observed in the Norton by-election. This overt surveillance, does not only intimidate voters but compels them to vote in a particular way in violation of Section 133B(c)(1) of the Electoral Act.

Turnout

ZESN observed that voter turnout in the Constituency was generally low especially amongst the youth voters. In addition, observers noted that there was a significantly high turnout amongst women voters as compared to men in the constituency. ZEC continues to collect age and gender aggregated data of voters in every by-election and this information is useful for targeted voter education and mobilisation programmes for future elections.

Campaign Environment

The Chimanimani West campaign period was marred by violence, intimidation and vote buying, a worrying pattern that continues to be observed in by-elections. The role of traditional leaders in the constituency during the campaign period has also come under scrutiny. Some of the traditional leaders were openly campaigning for ZANU PF. This is in contravention of Section 281(2) of the Constitution which states that “*traditional leaders must not act in a partisan manner nor further the interests of any political party*”. ZESN observed electoral malpractices that amount to vote buying such as giving out hand-outs in the form of maize and rice to lure voters. Furthermore, ZESN observed that the public media was biased in its coverage of the campaigns. Only ZANU PF rallies were covered whilst the rallies of other political parties and independent candidates were completely ignored.

Recommendations

1. There is need for ZEC and stakeholders including CSOs to implement extensive voter education programmes;
2. Voters inspection exercises must be supported by voter education for registered voters to appreciate the importance of such exercises;
3. The establishment of mechanisms to eliminate political violence and intimidation is crucial to create a conducive political environment where voters are able to exercise their right to vote without fear, intimidation or violence;
4. The government and ZEC must ensure that key electoral processes such as voter education are adequately funded to avoid disenfranchising voters on polling day who are turned away for bringing wrong identification documents or redirected for turning up at wrong polling stations amongst other reasons that could have been avoided by adequate voter education;

5. ZEC and the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission need to carry out investigations into reports and allegations of vote buying and intimidation and fully enforce the penalties stipulated in the Political Parties' Code of Conduct;
6. ZESN reiterates calls for ZEC to avail gender and age disaggregated data that is collected during elections to enable stakeholders to design programmes that target specific age and sex groups. Efforts must be made to collect data of special needs groups such as persons living with disabilities.

Chimanimani West by-election results

Candidate	Political Party	Sex	Votes Received
Gudyanga Peter	RDZ	M	183
Matsikenyere Nokuthula	ZANU PF	F	11,446
Musakanuka Pesanai	NCA	M	171
Mtetwa Edmore	Independent	M	3,018

Source: ZEC

**PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE
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