

ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



**SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT ON THE ISSUE OF THE BIOMETRIC VOTER
REGISTRATION AND ELECTRONIC VOTING**

15 March, 2017 – The Zimbabwe Election Support (ZESN) notes with concern the recent misconceptions over the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) amid concerns over the implementation of the system for the 2018 harmonised elections. Of particular interest is the misunderstanding of the difference between electronic voting and BVR. ZESN’s understanding is that the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) intends to use the technology solely for the purposes of capturing biometric features such as fingerprints during voter registration in order to create a new voters’ roll for the 2018 harmonized elections.

By way of definition, electronic or e-voting is voting using electronic means to either aid or take care of the chores of casting and counting votes in place of ballot papers as used in countries such as Brazil, Germany, USA, Venezuela and Namibia. On the other hand, BVR is where one or more physical, biological behavioural characteristics are stored usually in a database and used for deduplication and physical identification of voters at polling station level.

Thus, ZESN believes that the fears of technology failure are unfounded given that the technology will only be used for registering voters. On Election Day, voters will still be required to present their identification documents and be issued with a paper ballot paper and not vote electronically. Hence, it is important to note that there will be no technology failure on Election Day as ZEC will issue printed copies of the voters’ roll at polling stations.

In addition, there is need to ensure that there is no executive interference in the electoral processes as well as strict adherence to internationally accepted principles of voter registration such as transparency and inclusiveness for BVR to add value to Zimbabwe’s electoral processes.

Furthermore, the adoption of BVR will enhance trust and confidence in the voters’ roll which in previous elections has been highly contested emanating from the presence of duplicated entries and other errors. The new

voter registration system will result in a new voters' roll thus allaying fears of double and ghost voting. In addition, the engagement of technical partners whose expertise and experience in assisting other countries in the implementation of BVR systems will add confidence and build trust to the process whose outcomes have been disputed since the year 2000.

It is imperative for ZEC to clarify the issue of the BVR viz a viz electronic voting as the lack of voter information on the issue is creating a lot of confusion and giving rise to misinformation regarding how the Commission intends to use the technology. What should be made very clear in the voter education exercise is the fact that BVR is not electronic voting and will only be used for registering voters unless the Commission decides to expand the technology to other areas such as voter identification and results management on Election Day.

ZESN reiterates its position that BVR accompanied by other electoral reforms has great potential to transform the electoral system in Zimbabwe given that it offers significant protection against double registrations and inaccuracies. However, the implementation of BVR is not the panacea for all electoral challenges, there is still need to demonstrate political will to deal with issues of intimidation and violence by setting up measures to create a conducive political environment and to punish perpetrators of electoral violence.

In addition, ZESN notes that the BVR system requires careful planning, preparation and implementation and calls upon ZEC to provide adequate information regarding the implementation of the system given to ensure that all stakeholders understand how the system will be implemented in Zimbabwe.

ZESN calls upon the government to ensure that ZEC has adequate resources and time to deliver on its constitutional mandate to compile a new voters' roll which meets international best standards and requirements for a register namely; completeness, currency and accuracy.

ZESN is committed to promoting democratic elections in Zimbabwe.

**PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE
FOR COMMENTS AND FURTHER DETAILS CONTACT**

Zimbabwe Election Support Network ZESN Chairperson: +263774044213, ZESN Director: +263712415902

zesn2011@zesn.net / info@zesn.net or visit www.zesn.org.zw

Facebook Page: Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN)

Twitter Handle: @ZESN1