
ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK

MID-DAY STATEMENT: MWENEZI EAST NATIONAL ASSEMBLY BY-ELECTION

Harare- 8 April, 2017 - ZESN has deployed 32 static and mobile observers to the National Assembly by-election in Mwenezi East to assess the electoral processes at the 62 polling stations as well as the political environment around the Constituency. ZESN's observation methodology seeks to measure compliance of the Election Day processes with the Constitution, Electoral Laws as well as regional and international standards. As of Midday, the political environment in the constituency is calm and peaceful and voting is proceeding smoothly despite the tense pre-electoral period.

Voting is still on-going and ZESN is observing the voting process throughout the day the counting process at the end of the day and the collation of results at the ZEC Constituency Collating Centre. By midday the following are the observations so far:

Set up and Opening Procedures

ZESN has deployed observers at all the Ward collation centres as well as at selected polling stations. At all the polling stations where ZESN is observing, set up and opening procedures were duly followed with essential voting materials such as ballot boxes, ballot papers, indelible ink marker pens and voters' rolls present before polling. The polling stations are adequately manned with polling official averaging six (6) polling officials per polling station.

Redirected and Turned Away Voters

As of midday, ZESN has observed a significant number of voters being turned away for turning up at the wrong polling stations and having improper identification. Some of the voters who turned up at the wrong polling stations were redirected to other polling stations which at times were a considerable distance apart. For instance at Guramatunhu Primary School in Ward 13 by midday 19 people had been redirected to other polling stations as far away as 5 kilometres. The ZANU-PF Candidate Mr Joosbi Omar was redirected from Vilivili Primary School to Muzhanjire Primary School about 20km away in Ward 13 having also failed to vote at Chatagwi Primary School. There is need for The ZEC to conduct robust voter education on the Polling Station Based Voters' Roll and adequately publicise the inspection of the voters' rolls to avoid cases of voters turning up at the wrong polling stations.

Polling Agents

Political parties contesting the by-election were allowed to have one election agent inside the polling station and an additional agent stationed within the vicinity of the polling station. At all polling stations where ZESN observed ZANU PF had party agents while the Free Zimbabwe Congress had agents at most polling stations visited by the mobile teams and the NCA deploying very few polling agents.

Use of the two Voters' Rolls

ZESN notes the continued use of the two voters' rolls namely the main polling station based voters' rolls and a supplementary roll based on the previous ward based voters' rolls. ZESN reiterates its calls for the Commission to use of one voters' roll in future elections which will greatly enhance the transparency and integrity of the electoral process.

Voter Intimidation

Although the Election Day is generally peaceful the campaign period was marred by reports of allegations of intimidation, abuse of traditional leaders in campaigns, defacing of campaign materials, vote buying and partisan food distribution. In addition, at a rally held at Uvhunga Secondary School in Ward 13 traditional leaders were called upon to closely monitor and commandeer their subjects to ensure that they go to vote in blocks.

Turnout

ZESN observed long queues in the morning with the majority of voters being middle aged to elderly women. The processing of voters by the polling officials including those with special needs was observed to be efficient. The low participation of youths in this by-election is a worrying trend that has persisted since the 2013 harmonised elections.

ZESN will issue a preliminary statement on the by-election at the end of the election processes, which will include verified incidents that would have been reported during the day.

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PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE

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