

ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



BIOMETRIC VOTER REGISTRATION UPDATE - NUMBER 9

9 November 2017 – The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) continues to observe Phase 2 of the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) exercise in all the country's 10 provinces. The following update is based on observations made over the past 7 days.

Voter Registration Procedures

At 100% of registration centres where ZESN observers were stationed, the registration officials correctly followed the registration steps such as capturing fingerprints, facial photographs, scanning relevant documents and issuing out voter registration slips. Observer reports also indicated that 96% of the centres opened before 8 am with the remaining 4% opening by 8:30 am.

Cases of Intimidation

ZESN continues to receive disturbing reports of intimidation of observers and citizens by traditional leaders and political players. For instance, a ZESN observer in Ward 1 Rushinga was summoned and admonished by the Chief of that area for observing the BVR process in his area without seeking his permission first. In addition, cases of intimidation whereby registrants are being asked to submit serial numbers on their registration slips continue to be reported in areas such as Honde Valley Ward 28, Nyanga North Ward 3, Greystone Park at New March Shopping Centre Ward 18, and Bikita East among others.

Issues with Proof of Residence

ZESN has observed that the registration process is being slowed down by the scarcity of commissioners of oaths, resulting in potential registrants waiting for hours before their documents are certified. In ward 28 of Honde Valley in Mutasa North a ZANU PF councilor threatened one of the headmasters who are providing commissioners of oath services with unspecified action if he continued to write letters confirming residency of potential registrants. The councilor indicated that this service was the prerogative of the Village Head only.

Turnout of registrants

According to statistics released by ZEC, 2 043 302 eligible voters had been registered as of 7 November 2017 representing 28.3% of targeted potential registrants. Harare recorded the highest number of registrants with 309,951 whilst Bulawayo had the lowest turnout with 71,536 representing 17.5% of potential registrants in the city. Generally ZESN continues to observe low turnout amongst youths and persons with disabilities (PWDs) and urges electoral stakeholders to enhance mobilisation efforts towards youths, PWDs and women by availing adequate awareness programmes as well as publicity of the location of the voter registration centres.

Access to registration centres by special needs groups

ZESN has observed that at most centres special needs groups such as persons with disabilities, the elderly, pregnant and nursing mothers are being given first preference to register as voters. However, there are reports that some centres are inaccessible to PWDs, for example, Shiku School in Runde Ward 4, Mount Belingwe in Ward 4 Mberengwa North are not easily accessible to persons using wheelchairs and walking aids. As such there is need for ZEC to ensure that mechanisms are put in place to enable PWDs and the elderly to register conveniently.

Observers denied access to centres

Some accredited ZESN observers were denied access into registration centres by Ward registration supervisors insisting that they first report to the District offices. Observers were denied access in Zvishavane at Nyaradzai Hall in ward 8, Lundi Hospital in Ward 10 and Weleza in Ward 13 as well as at Thekwane High School in Bulilima East. ZESN through its member organisation the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights engaged ZEC resulting in the observers being allowed into the centres. ZEC should ensure that its officers facilitate the observation of the voter registration exercise as this is crucial for promoting transparency and credibility of electoral processes.

Recommendations

1. ZESN implores ZEC to engage with the traditional leaders in order to discontinue the abuse of their mandate and desist from interfering in electoral processes.
2. ZESN calls for measures to be put in place for the creation of a conducive electoral environment that facilitates the free observation of and participation in key electoral processes.
3. ZEC should ensure that BVR centres are easily accessible to all eligible citizens and ensure that PWDs and other special needs groups are not inconvenienced when they present themselves for the registration process.

4. Intensification of targeted voter education and mobilisation efforts towards the youths and other segments of the population whose turnout statistics are low.