

ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



THE NINTH PARLIAMENT MUST PRIORITISE ELECTORAL REFORMS - ZESN

Harare – 17 September 2018 - The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) notes with anticipation the notice by the Speaker of Parliament on the joint sitting of both houses of Parliament where, President Mnangagwa will set out the Government's legislative agenda for the ninth Parliament as well as provide the State of Nation Address.

ZESN notes that comprehensive reform of the existing electoral legislation remains a critical component of efforts to further improve our democracy. Previous efforts at improving electoral laws have remained piecemeal.

Some of the outstanding issues from the previous electoral reform initiatives include limitations on the independence of ZEC, the right to vote especially for those in the diaspora, hospital patients and prisoners, the procurement and printing of ballot papers remains shrouded in secrecy and there are no provisions directing the separation of election residue to enable petitioners to obtain a recount for a specified election. Another notable omission is the absence of a framework to guide the operations and accreditation of long term observers.

The 2018 elections witnessed a number of notable improvements from previous elections as well as missed opportunities to fully consolidate the democratic space and break from the past. This is evident in the range of issues that were raised by various observer missions, who came up with a raft of recommendations that should be effected to improve the electoral landscape in Zimbabwe. Some of these recommendations include the need for the full alignment the country's laws to the Constitution, need for political will to fully implement policies and protocols that promote the inclusion of women as candidates, and the need to strengthen the legal framework governing electoral media coverage in order to enhance fair, balanced and responsible reporting by the media, in particular the public media.

In keeping with its legislative role, the ninth Parliament is seized with a unique opportunity to institute comprehensive electoral reforms that can better respond to the diverse interests of electoral stakeholders. This will support the creation of a more even electoral environment and electoral outcomes that are uncontested.

In addition, reforms to strengthen the independence of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission must be put in place in order to enhance transparency in electoral processes such as postal voting, results management and transmission.

Unlike previous electoral cycles, the ninth Parliament and the Government have a unique opportunity to deal with issues related to electoral reform, way ahead of the next Harmonized elections, scheduled for 2023. This will give electoral stakeholders ample time to acquaint themselves with electoral laws and regulations.

ZESN remains committed to support the promotion of democratic electoral processes that are in line with best practices recognized in regional and International Instruments governing the conduct of democratic elections.

PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE

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