

ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



NATIONAL DIALOGUE MUST RESULT IN COMPREHENSIVE ELECTORAL AND POLITICAL REFORMS – ZESN

7 February 2019 – The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) notes the call by President Emmerson Mnangagwa for dialogue with political parties that participated in the 30 July 2018 harmonised elections. ZESN reiterates its position that the dialogue must be inclusive of all electoral stakeholders namely civic society organisations, churches, the media, women, persons with disability and youths among others.

Pursuant to calls by various electoral stakeholders for inclusive multi-stakeholder dialogue on electoral and political reforms, ZESN believes that it is imperative for the dialogue to culminate in an electoral and political reforms taskforce that will expeditiously spearhead much needed reforms for future electoral processes. Below are the key demands that ZESN insists need to be considered during the national dialogue process:

Independence of ZEC

There is need to ensure the full independence of ZEC by reviewing clauses that compromise and interfere with the administrative operations of the Commission by the Executive in the administrative operations of the Commission. ZESN urges the ZEC to adopt open data principles by making available pertinent information on electoral processes in timely, easy to read, complete and analysable format. The legal framework must be reviewed to ensure a more transparent results management and transmission system. ZESN calls upon ZEC to ensure that any changes to election results are open to observation by political parties.

Voter registration and the Voters roll

ZESN calls for the legal provisions that facilitate the ease of registration for urban voters through the establishment of more permanent voter registration centres and ensure that ZEC provides final copies of the voters roll to be used in polling stations to all political parties and candidates. For future elections, ZEC must invest in procurement of integrated systems that allow a single device to be used for multiple purposes such as enrolling voters, verification of voters on election day and transmission of election results.

Political environment

ZESN reiterates its calls for the establishment of a conducive political environment that enables the holding of free, fair and credible elections devoid of violence and intimidation. There is need for an effective and efficient electoral dispute resolution mechanism that responds to conflicts and disputes before, during and after an election by strengthening institutions supporting democracy such as Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission and the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission. Commitments must be made towards zero tolerance to violence, intimidation, politicisation of food aid and partisan involvement of traditional leaders.

In addition, there is need to tighten provisions on the role of traditional leaders to deter their partisan involvement in politics but rather strengthen their role in peace building and social cohesion by empowering them to deal with political disputes that arise in their jurisdiction in a non-partisan manner. The government must ensure that fundamental freedoms such as freedom of expression, association and assembly are respected to facilitate the full enjoyment of democratic rights by all citizens.

Media

It is imperative for media law to be reviewed to ensure media pluralism, diversity that facilitates equal coverage and access to the media by all contesting political parties and candidates. ZEC must put in place effective mechanisms to ensure compliance by all media as well as share its media monitoring report widely with key stakeholders. Additionally, mechanisms must be established to deal with hate speech and the fake news phenomenon especially on social media.

Delimitation of electoral boundaries

Zimbabwe has conducted three sets of elections on the basis of the 2008 delimitation exercise, it is imperative to therefore timeously conduct delimitation of electoral boundaries for the 2023 elections in order to rationalise constituencies based on principles of equality of voting strength and representativeness.

ZESN reiterates its recommendation for ZEC to conduct comprehensive stakeholder consultations on the process to ensure compliance with international standards of equal voting strength, representativeness, and community of interest.

In view of the existing gaps in electoral law, there is need for the ZEC to convene an all-inclusive Electoral Reforms Working Group to strengthen the integrity of electoral processes. The working group could include all Chapter 12 institutions, Parliament, political parties, CSOs, and eminent persons.

Women's participation

With the women's parliamentary quota coming to an end in 2023, it is imperative for government, political parties and ZEC to ensure compliance with Constitutional provisions for the equal representation of women in all key decision making positions. ZEC must also institute a prerequisite for all political parties to submit their papers with equal representation of both men and women before elections. ZESN believes that the dialogue process must take into consideration the need to ensure that there is equal

participation of women in electoral processes as candidates as well as voters. Hindrances to women's participation in elections such as violence, intimidation and lack of financial resources must be addressed so as to encourage their participation.

Conclusion

ZESN strongly believes that the pathway to the next election should be defined by a comprehensive electoral and political reforms process established and implemented by all key stakeholders.

An inclusive and comprehensive dialogue on electoral and political reforms will ensure that future election processes are devoid of disputes that have bedevilled previous elections.//Ends/

**PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE
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