

## ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



### PRELIMINARY STATEMENT ON THE 23 FEBRUARY LOCAL AUTHORITY BY-ELECTIONS

**Harare – 24 February 2019** – As part of its comprehensive efforts to observe the local authority by-elections in Beitbridge East Ward 15, Chitungwiza South Ward 24 and Matobo North Ward 25, the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) trained and deployed 17 election observers to every polling station in the three wards. The by-elections are the first to be held in 2019.

This Preliminary Statement is based on reports from the observers who comprised of static observers based at polling stations and collation centres as well as mobile observer teams who were roving around the Wards. The political environment within which the three by-elections were held was generally peaceful and calm without reports of any major incidents.

#### **Observation methodology**

The findings and recommendations of this preliminary statement are made in reference to the Electoral Laws of Zimbabwe, the Revised Southern African Development Community (SADC) Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections as well as other regional and African election guidelines and principles.

#### **Set up and opening of Polling Stations**

Observers reported that all polling stations were set up on time and in accordance with the laid down ZEC procedures in a manner that ensures secrecy of the vote. ZESN observers also reported that polling stations were equipped with special booths to cater for persons with disabilities particularly those in wheelchairs. All polling stations were reported to have opened on time with all requisite voting materials such as ballot boxes, ballot papers, voter's rolls, indelible marker ink and official ZEC stamps.

#### **Voting Process and Procedures**

Observer reports show that the voting process in the three by-elections proceeded smoothly at all polling stations with laid down voting procedures such as checking voters' names against the voters' roll and examining voters' finger for indelible duly followed. At all polling stations in the three wards, all voters had a finger marked with indelible ink before voting and ballot papers stamped with the ZEC stamp before being issued. In addition, at polling stations in the three wards, voters were required to present

identification before voting with those having defaced or invalid identification such as drivers' licences being turned away.

### **Political environment**

ZESN observed that the political environment on Election Day was largely calm. However an incident was reported at Unit M Creche in Chitungwiza where it was alleged that supporters of ZANU PF and MDC Alliance argued over suspicions of vote buying close to the polling station. The situation was diffused by the riot police before any violent clashes transpired. There were no major incidents reported in the other two local authority by-elections.

### **Turned away, redirected voters**

ZESN noted a significant number of turned away voters at polling stations for various reasons including turning up at the wrong polling stations, not being registered to vote in the ward and having improper identification. Voters who turned up at wrong polling stations were redirected to their appropriate stations. For instance, in Chitungwiza at St Aidain's AA polling station, 54 voters had been redirected to other polling stations as at 16:00 hours. At Seke 3 BB 86 people had been redirected to other polling stations and 5 turned away at 18:00 hours. In Matobo North Ward 25, at Matobo Research as at 16:00 hours, 8 people had been turned away for not being registered to vote. In addition, at Seke 3 some voters from neighbouring Ward 18 were turned away upon presenting themselves to vote. The voters indicated that they had voted at the school during the 30 July harmonised election hence the assumption they were eligible to vote.

### **Assisted voters**

ZESN observed instances of assisted voters due to illiteracy, old age and visual impairments. Most voters who were assisted to vote did not bring relatives or friends to assist them resulting in the presiding officers and election officers rendering the assistance. For instance, at Dumba School in Beitbridge 26 were assisted to vote of which 21 were Female and 5 Male.

### **Political Party Agents**

Political Parties and candidates are allowed to have one election agent inside the polling station and an additional agent stationed within the vicinity of the polling station. However, in Chitungwiza South Ward 24, of the four contesting parties only ZANU PF and the MDC Alliance comprehensively deployed election agents. ZESN reiterates its call for political parties to deploy election agents to enable them to observe and authoritatively comment on electoral processes.

### **Counting and results management**

In the three by-elections, ZESN observers were permitted to observe counting at all polling stations. ZESN observed that closing and counting procedures were duly followed including checking the seals on ballot boxes, requesting election agents to sign V11 forms and posting results outside polling stations.

## Election Results

ZANU PF won the Beitbridge East Ward 15 and Matobo North Ward 25 local authority by-elections and the MDC Alliance won the Chitungwiza South Ward 24 seat. Below are the complete results for each Ward:

### Beitbridge East Ward 15 results

Candidate	Political Party	Votes Received
Mbedzi Rabson	ZANU PF	638
Moyo Victor	MDC Alliance	54
Rejected votes		6

Source: ZEC

### Chitungwiza South Ward 24

Candidate	Political Party	Votes Received
Chagwada Yotam	MDC Alliance	1 059
Guvamombe Mercy	ZANU PF	993
Makovere Jane	MDC-T	29
Tsakeni Anderson	NCA	3
Rejected votes		9

Source: ZEC

### Matobo North Ward 25

Candidate	Political Party	Votes Received
Dube Sibonginkosi	ZANU PF	483
Sibanda Elkanah	MDC Alliance	121
Rejected votes		3

Source: ZEC

## Recommendations

1. Contesting political parties and candidates must endeavour to comprehensively deploy party agents in elections to enable them to authoritatively monitor and make informed assessments of the electoral process.
2. There is need for continuous civic and voter education in between elections by ZEC and CSOs in order to reduce numbers of turned away voters.
3. ZEC should devise mechanisms of clearly marking out polling stations to reduce the number of redirected voters.
4. There is need to put in place mechanisms to reduce instances of assisted voters and put administrative reform measures to help improve people with disabilities and assisted voters' access to a secret ballot.

5. ZESN urges political parties to field more female candidates and youths as contestants in elections to ensure that there is equal gender and youth representation in leadership positions.

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