

ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



Press Statement

Situational Statement on Ward 2 of Chegutu Municipality Local Authority by-election

21 March 2020 – The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) is observing the Ward 2 Chegutu Municipality Local Authority by-election. The Chegutu Ward 2 seat fell vacant following the death of MDC Alliance councillor, Memory Banda in December 2019. The by-election is being held in accordance with Section 121A of the Electoral Act (Chapter 2:13). While ZESN acknowledges the importance of holding by-elections within the stipulated timeframes, ZESN is concerned with the holding of the by-election in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Typically local authority by-elections have not attracted queues of over 30 people at any given time during polling. However ZESN's concern is that by-elections provide a reason for people to leave their homes at a time when movement should be restricted as much as practically possible, in order to limit exposure of citizens to COVID-19.

ZESN observers reported that the political environment in the Ward had been reported to be tranquil with no incidents of violence or malpractices having been observed. Two candidates which are; the MDC Alliance's Machejera Rydes Tinokura and ZANU-PF's Mutongerwa Prosper are contesting in the by-election after having been duly nominated on Thursday 8 February 2020.

ZESN trained and deployed two volunteers to observe polling proceedings at the two polling stations and also deployed an observer at the Ward Collation Centre.

By midday, these observers had reported the following:

Displaying of the voters' roll

ZESN observers reported that the voters' rolls were displayed outside the polling stations to allow voters to check their names before polling day in Chegutu Ward 2 and this was done at least 2 days ahead of the by-elections.

Set up and opening of polling stations

The polling stations opened on time and all the essential polling materials such as ballot boxes, ballot papers, indelible finger markers, voters' roll, the ZEC official stamp, were available at all polling stations where ZESN had observers. However, in view of the topical global pandemic COVID-19, there were no preventative measures put in place for voters, polling officials, political party agents and observers, such as hand sanitizers.

Polling officials

On average, each of the two polling stations had six polling officers at the time of opening. It is encouraging to see that both sexes were represented as polling officials including presiding officers.

Voting process and procedures

At all polling stations where ZESN is observing, voting has been proceeding well, with all polling procedures being duly followed in accordance with the law. Observers reported that there were no long queues at any given time. At Rifle Range polling station, one voter refused to place his finger on the table to get his finger marked with an indelible marker citing that it was unhealthy given the COVID-19 scare.

Political Parties' agents

It is commendable to note that both MDC Alliance and ZANU-PF have comprehensively deployed party agents both women and men to track the polling process at the two polling stations. At Madhatter Pre-school polling station, ZANU-PF deployed two females and one male polling agents, while MDC Alliance deployed two males and one female. At Rifle Range Tent, there is one female and three male political party agents tracking the polling process on behalf of the MDC Alliance and ZANU-PF deployed two female party agents.

Assisted voters

The numbers of assisted voters are significantly low in the by-election. Of the approximately 250 people that had voted by 12 noon, in this by-election, one male had been assisted to vote at Madhatter Pre-school polling station. This visually impaired voter brought their own assistant. At Rifle Range Tent polling station, one elderly female and one visually impaired male also brought their own assistants to help them cast their vote.

Turned away and redirected voters

At Rifle Range Tent polling station 14 people; 13 males and one female were turned away due to various reasons, chief among them; bringing driver's licences as identification particulars. Four people who were registered in a different ward, were turned away. At Madhatter Pre-school polling station, one male and one female were turned away for the same reason. Two females were redirected from Rifle Range Tent polling station to Madhatter Pre-school polling station.

Conclusion

ZESN will continue to observe and issue updates and a preliminary statement as well as a report of the by-election with appropriate recommendations. The Network urges all registered voters in Chegutu Ward 2 to exercise their constitutional right by going out to cast their vote in peace since voting is continuing until 1900 hours in the evening. In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, voters are advised to take the necessary preventative measures when venturing into public spaces.

ZESN remains committed to promoting democratic elections in Zimbabwe. //Ends

PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE

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