



**Zimbabwe Election
Support Network**
Promoting Democratic
Elections In Zimbabwe



Situational Statement on the Opening and Set-up of Polling Stations

26 March 2022

3:00 pm

Today Zimbabweans across 28 constituencies and 122 local authorities head to the polls to cast their votes for the long delayed parliamentary and local authority by-elections. The political environment during the pre-election period was marred by issues of political violence, election-related intimidation, and attempts to limit electoral competition through the restriction of campaign activities. Voter information and education associated with the voter registration process has not been comprehensive enough ahead of the by-elections. This shortcoming in public engagement, when viewed alongside the administration of the two different voters' rolls in constituencies where there are concurrent elections for the National Assembly and Ward by-elections, has resulted in confusion amongst voters in the affected areas. Stakeholders have also expressed concern over the quality and integrity of the voters' roll, which was further compounded by the delay by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission's (ZEC) in sharing the official voters' roll for analysis.

It is against this background that Election Resource Centre (ERC) and Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) deployed more than 400 trained and accredited election day observers. ERC and ZESN are using complementary methodologies of mobile and stationary observers to assess the election day processes at the polling stations across the 28 constituencies. Observer reports are used to provide citizens and key stakeholders with accurate, independent, timely, and credible information on the overall election process.

This ERC and ZESN situational statement is based on the observation findings on the opening and set-up of polling stations. These are preliminary findings as of 12:00 noon on election day.

Arrival and Opening of Polling Stations

As of 7:00 am, ERC and ZESN observers reported that ZEC Electoral Officers were present and making set-up preparations in readiness for the voting process. Similarly, observers noted that almost all polling stations were open by 7:15 am, with limited instances of polling stations opening between 7:15 to 8:00 am.

All the ERC and ZESN observers were accredited to observe the by-elections and were allowed to observe.

Set-up of Polling Stations

Polling stations require critical materials for the election to be conducted. These include: ballot boxes, ballot papers, indelible ink, official stamps, and availability of the biometric voters' roll. During the set-up and opening of the polling stations for voting, ERC and ZESN observers reported that: all the parliamentary and local authority ballot boxes were present and all ballot boxes were shown to be empty. In addition, all had the correct ballot papers, indelible ink for marking the voters' fingers and the biometric voters' roll with voters' photographs. Observers also reported that most polling stations were set-up in a way that allowed for voters to mark their ballot in secret.

Presence of Party Agents

Political parties are key stakeholders in the electoral processes and their presence can increase trust and accountability in the election. Observers reported that in most of the polling stations there were agents for ZANU-PF and CCC. There were also agents for the MDC-Alliance and other parties, but to a lesser extent.

Presence of Uniformed Security Personnel (Zimbabwe Republic Police)

Uniformed security officers are key ingredients in maintaining peace and order as well as maintaining security for the electoral officials, election materials, equipment, and the citizens. ERC and ZESN observers reported that in almost all the polling stations there were security officials stationed at the polling stations. However, at a limited number of polling stations concerns were raised around unclear positioning of police officers as most polling stations had a police officer inside and another stationed outside. This was noted at Magwegwe Primary in ward 18 of Magwegwe Constituency, Msitheli High School in ward 19 of Pelandaba-Mpopoma, and Robert Sinyoka polling station ward 17 in Pumula Constituency, among others.

Electoral Officials

The ERC and ZESN observers generally reported that there was an adequate number of ZEC officials across polling stations observed. Additionally, gender balance across ZEC staff, including the Presiding Officer, was upheld at most polling stations.

Accessibility

Polling stations must be accessible to voters, including those with limited mobility or disability to ensure they have an equal opportunity to vote. ERC and ZESN observers reported that a number of polling stations were not easily accessible such as Epworth, Murehwa South, and Chivi South.

Critical Incidents

High Number of Assisted Voters: At Mangani Business Centre Tent A in Binga North Constituency, ERC and ZESN observers reported a high number of assisted voters (over 75) by mid-day. Observers reported that traditional leaders brought groups of voters to the polling station with an instruction for them to ask to be assisted to vote for the ZANU-PF candidate.

Unauthorized Persons at Polling Station: ERC and ZESN observers reported that Zengeza West Member of Parliament (MP) visited several polling stations in St Marys Constituency without the required authorisation from the ZEC, resulting in disruption of polling at some of those polling stations.

Issues Surrounding Indelible Ink: ERC and ZESN observers as well as voters have reported wide variation in the types of indelible ink colors used by ZEC to mark voters' fingers. A concern has been that the blueish variance of the ink is of poor quality and may not be able to prevent multiple voting. In limited instances, there are concerns over the quality of indelible ink being used by ZEC. Reports and images were received from Buhera ward 23, Mwenezi East and Nkulumane polling stations. Indelible ink is important in safeguarding against multiple voting; however poor quality raises fears of potential malpractice. ERC and ZESN urges ZEC to address this concern.

Conclusion

ERC and ZESN will continue to observe the by-elections and will provide timely information on the conduct of the electoral process. Observers will remain at polling stations until the end of voting, closing of polls and posting of the results outside polling stations.

ERC and ZESN observe on a nonpartisan basis in order to ensure the elections are transparent, inclusive, and accountable. ERC and ZESN urge citizens to vote in peace and political parties to adhere to the code of conduct stipulated in the electoral law and for ZEC to ensure all political parties and candidates comply with the code.

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