



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

Press Statement

ZESN COMMEMORATES NATIONAL YOUTH DAY

21-February-2023- The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) joins the nation in commemorating the National Youth Day and calls for active participation of youth in electoral processes in line with Section 67 of the Zimbabwean Constitution. The National Youth Day, established to recognize youths and their contributions to different areas in the country comes at a time when the country is preparing for the 2023 harmonized elections.

Whilst the youth are an important demographic group in the country constituting 67.7% of the total population, their participation and representation in key governance processes remains low due to lower voter registration and low turnout during polling. ZESN thus, implores youths to exercise their constitutional rights through taking part in continuous voter registration as well as in participating in various electoral processes peacefully.

The Network, reaffirming the principle of inclusivity and participation by all and especially young people as is enshrined in the constitution for all electoral processes, reiterates the importance of fostering an enabling, level playing and safe environment for youths participating in electoral processes as well as political spaces. Critical is the importance of opening up these spaces to younger people to take part in electoral processes as candidates, observers and election workers among other roles key to the democratic processes of Zimbabwe.

Further, ZESN welcomes the institutionalisation of the youth quota in the National Assembly to enhance their participation in democratic governance processes as this is something that youth had been lobbying for since 2017. However, there is need for the government and political parties to employ the 25% threshold as outlined in the National Youth Policy, to ensure representation of youth in all public office and leadership positions from the grassroots going upwards e.g. village, ward, and council to National level. The Network also calls on the Ministry of Justice, Parliamentary and Legal Affairs and ZEC to consider lowering nomination fees for youth to enable them to join the race.

Youth participation in political and electoral violence has a negative effect on their political, economic and social inclusion. They are often coerced by the political leadership to play a role only limited to mobilising, channelling youthful political participation and in some cases perpetrating acts of violence to further their political leaders' interests. On the other hand, the youth have also been victims of political violence, hence there is a need to

foster peace, conflict management and tolerance of divergent views ahead of the 2023 plebiscite. ZESN urges youth not to allow themselves to be used to cause violence in the coming elections.

Dynamic development and adoption of new technologies presented through the usage of a vast array of different social media platforms has improved the way people communicate and share information. This has meant to a great extent, the empowerment of youths, and a milestone which this National youth day seeks to celebrate as youths are not only empowered but given a chance to innovate, interact with different opportunities, get more information and understanding on the importance of voting as well as interact with other different voter education material.

However, ZESN is saddened by the levels of improper usage of social media to mis-inform, dis-inform, mal-inform citizens regarding electoral issues and to character assassinate through hate speech and derogatory comments. These are crimes the youth have perpetrated and/ or fallen victim to, which in turn has led to young voter apathy and youth disassociation with the need to take up leadership positions.

The Zimbabwe Election Support Network urges young people to uproot vices such as drug and alcohol abuse, violence and the abuse of social media that threaten their existence as responsible citizens, limiting their full participation and positive influence in the electoral processes which in turn erodes trust, credibility and slows the democratic momentum of the nation. The Network reiterates its call for youth to foster peace and not to allow themselves to be used to cause violence in the coming harmonized elections. //ENDS

PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE

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