

**Report on Local Authority Election and  
Hurungwe West By-Election 28-29 September 2002 – Advance Copy**  
*Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN)*  
October 17, 2002

**INTRODUCTION**

The local authority elections held on 28-29 September 2002 were held as part of the four year cycle of rural district council elections to elect councillors in all the wards in the rural district councils in Zimbabwe. The rural district councils were created following the amalgamation of the previously white rural councils covering mainly commercial farming areas and previously black district councils covering mainly communal and resettlement areas.

The two have now being combined so that a typical rural district council will include in its boundaries, commercial, resettlement, communal, purchase areas and rural growth points.

Urban council elections are due to be held in August 2003. However there are some wards which have become vacant as a result of removal of the councillor through death or disqualification. These were combined with the rural district council elections and held on the same days although the inspection of the voters' roll took place earlier than that for the districts.

Also held concurrently with the rural district council elections was the Hurungwe West Parliamentary By-Election to fill the vacancy left by the death of the Member of Parliament, Mr Mark Madiro. Nomination for this election was held on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2002. Justin Dandawa and Phone Madiro brother to the late Mark were duly nominated as candidates for the MDC and Zanu-PF respectively.

## **LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF THE URBAN AND RURAL DISTRICT COUNCILS ELECTIONS**

The rural district councils were established in terms of the Rural District Councils Act (Chapter 29:13) There are 57 rural district councils and 25 urban councils.

Before the Local Authorities Election Laws Amendment Act No, 21 of 1997, elections were conducted in terms of the Rural District Council Act and the Urban Councils Act. In urban councils, the town clerk had the responsibility for the conduct of the elections from the preparation of the voters' roll right up to the counting of votes cast and the announcement of results. The executive officer of the rural district council had similar responsibilities. The said Act transferred the conduct of local authority elections from the local council official to the Registrar General. Provision for local authority election in the Urban Councils Act were deleted and provision for the same was made in the Electoral Act.

The amendment went further to repeal property requirements for voters and to extend the voting franchise to all the residents of a council area who are qualified to be on the common voters' roll which is used in Parliamentary elections. Apart from setting out the duties and responsibilities of the Registrar General, the Electoral Act gives responsibilities to the Minister of Justice and sets out the qualifications of voters and candidates for councillorship and the office of the mayor. However, local authorities are responsible for electoral expenses incurred by the Registrar General.

The provision of the Electoral Act relating to the election of members of Parliament apply to local authority elections. To be elected as an urban councillor in Zimbabwe, one needs

- ◆ Be a citizen of Zimbabwe
- ◆ Have attained the age of 21 years
- ◆ Be entitled to vote in any election of councillor and has his name appearing on the voters' roll prepared for the election of councillors
- ◆ Is not disqualified from nomination or election as a councillor
- ◆ Should have at least 5 'O' Levels and at least 2 'A' levels

The term of office is four years.

### **Electoral Officers and Their Responsibilities**

#### **Registrar General**

The Registrar General is required to prepare a voters' roll in each year in which an election of mayor or a general election of councillors is to take place. Instead of preparing a new voters' roll, the Registrar General can prepare a supplementary roll containing the names of additional voters and a removal list containing the names of those who although appearing on the voters' roll are no longer qualified. The voters' roll is open to inspection by the public free of charge at the office of the Registrar General.

#### **Notice of the Election**

The Registrar General is required to publish a notice in a newspaper and to post at his office notice of any election not more than 66 days or less than 28 days before the day of the election. The notice will give details of vacancy to be filled, the day on which the voters' roll will be regarded as closed, the place and day on which nomination court will sit to receive nominations and the day on which voting will take place. Where more than one person has been nominated in respect of a vacancy to be filled, the Registrar General is required to publish a notice in a newspaper giving the names of the candidates, the dates on which a poll will be held and the situation of each fixed polling station.

#### **Declaration of Results**

Where only one candidate is duly nominated, the Registrar General is required to declare him duly elected.

After ascertaining the result of the poll, the Registrar General is required to immediately declare the candidate for whom the majority of votes have been cast duly elected. In the event that there is an equality of votes, the Registrar General determines the successful candidate by drawing of lots.

#### **The Minister of Justice**

The Minister has the power to postpone elections. In the case of the position of councillor, the minister can postpone the election to a later date which is not later than one year after the last date on which the election should have been held. In the case of the office of mayor the postponement is limited to not later than 3 months from the date of occurrence of the vacancy. The Minister is also given general powers to direct that anything which is determinable from a particular date be done by a different date.

The Minister has the power to make regulations governing the conduct of elections but is required to first consult the Minister of Local Government.

#### **The Local Authority**

The expenses of an election are met by the local authority concerned.

#### **The Contested Positions**

A general election of councillors is held in every four years on date in August fixed by the Registrar General. A by-election to fill a vacancy arising from a councillor ceasing to hold office for whatever reason is held on a date to be fixed by the Registrar General which date has to be not less than thirty days nor more than ninety days after the occurrence of the vacancy.

Only persons who have attained the age of 21, are citizens of Zimbabwe enrolled on the voters' roll for the ward concerned qualify to be elected as councillors. To qualify to be a voter, a person has to be resident in the area and qualified in terms of the Constitution for registration as a voter on the common roll. Disqualified from being nominated for election are councillors of another local authority, members of Parliament, persons convicted of contravening certain sections of the Urban Councils Act or Rural District Councils Act or of dishonesty involving local authority funds, council employees, persons in default in the payment of any council charge for more than 120 days and councillors who are under suspension or who are barred from standing having been discharged by the Minister of Local Government.

A candidate for election as a councillor has to be nominated by at least five persons who appear on the voters' roll for the ward concerned.

A nominee may before the first polling day withdraw his candidacy by notifying the Registrar General.

In the event of a nominee dying before at anytime before the close of the poll, all proceedings in respect of the election are terminated and all proceedings are commenced afresh.

## **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LOCAL AUTHORITY ELECTIONS**

Local authority elections are significant in so far as they are the cornerstone for political mobilisation and local government level. It is the first entry point, regardless of the fact it is considered inconsequential has the residents participate in the socio-economic debate at village, district and provincial level. The development of such a unit in terms of awareness of political and human rights which will in turn impact on national politics would have been an ideal situation and a norm that will ensure greater participation of the residents of an area in the national politics of the country.

The elections are unique in that they are the only election in which a resident can successfully influence the running of a neighbourhood. For instance, one would influence the system involved in water and sewage reticulation, rates, health and education, social amenities and the town, city and/or district budgets.

In particular, the just ended election was a pivotal point where power sharing and franchises between the two main political parties was tested. To ZANU PF the election was conceded to be a battle for supremacy and political space. As a ruling party, its aim was to consolidate power at all levels of governance starting from central to local governance using any means at their disposal. Penetration and proliferation of the party will be vital since there is a threat in the form of the opposition. The rural electorate, whose accustomed allegiance to ZANU PF which is unfailing needed only to reaffirm their loyalty as they did and aid the party to retain control over the territory which has fond and nostalgic memories of the liberation struggle. According to reports there are areas where the elections only has the ruling party fielding a candidate. This would then mean that the election will be uncontested. A characteristic feature of the just ended local authority election was the numerous uncontested elections. It was alleged that opposition candidates were intimidated and beaten as a way of ensuring that they did not participate in the election. To the opposition, the election would facilitate the creation of more political fiefdom within the local governance arena.

The quality of elected councillors would impact on the services they would deliver hence the need to conscientise people to vote for merit not according to the principles of a political party which would see local governance transcending party politics and idiosyncrasies.

### **The voters' roll**

The voters roll is the official register containing the names, identification numbers and addresses of every eligible Zimbabwean who has registered to vote in the voting area (ward, municipality or constituency) that is covered by the particular voters' roll.

Criteria used to determine eligibility includes age, residence status and citizenship status. Historically the voters' roll is one of the perennial contentious election issues.

The voters roll as compiled by and used by the Registrar General for most elections since 1980 has been the subject of numerous contestations notably from the opposition who allege that the voters' roll is one of the key sites election rigging and there is no transparency and accountability in the manner in which it is compiled. A number of election results have been nullified after the courts agreed with this contention.

For the local authority elections in September 2002, the inspection of the roll by the voters took place from 6<sup>th</sup>- 16th August 2002. The advertisements were placed in the press and began to appear on the 6<sup>th</sup> August 2002, a day after the rolls opened for inspection and again on the 10<sup>th</sup> of August 2002. Considering that the majority of these elections were rural and the fact that a significant number of rural voter are either semi-literate and have limited access to the printed media, it is doubtful that the message reached all the potential voters. In Makonde district during the election, several voters on being told that their names were not on the voters' roll complained that they had not know that there was an inspection or else they would have inspected the voters' roll for their names and particulars. Other voters were also turned away who had voted in the March 2002 election.

Such anomalies coming six months after the March 2002 election show that there are serious loopholes in the computer system used to extract names by districts, wards and constituencies since the problem of names missing from the voters' roll is not a new phenomenon.

Another worrying aspect of the voters' roll inspection was the time period of two weeks which is quite short for a national election and pales in comparison to the voters' roll inspection and registration exercises preceding the 2000 Parliamentary Elections and the 2002 Presidential Elections which took at least 2 months each. Although this can be mitigated by the fact that voter registration is continuous and that the Registrar-General's office has embarked on a campaign to automatically update the roll using the national registry of births and deaths, it is clear that the system has serious problems which need to be looked into as a matter of urgency.

Nevertheless the inspection of the voters' roll during which period, current and prospective voters are expected to verify their identification details did take place and the necessary changes were made to the voters' roll.

## **NOMINATION COURTS**

### **Hurungwe West By-Election**

This court sat in Karoi on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2002 and two candidates from MDC and ZANU-PF respectively were duly nominated as candidates. The MDC almost failed to nominate after its candidate Justin Dandawa's papers were found to be not in order and had to be extended by the nomination court to 1635hrs with the process of his nomination being completed by about 1915hrs.

The atmosphere at the nomination court in Karoi town was tense with Zanu PF supporters manning both entrances to the nomination from 0800hrs to 1500hrs to those whom they knew or approved of. This group of supporters was led by Wilbert Bonga, then an aspiring councillor for Ward 3 in Karoi

The aspiring independent candidate, Mr Chinembiri withdrew at the last minute and was photographed shaking hands with Mr Phone Madiro, the Zanu PF candidate.

### **Rural District Councils**

The nomination courts for the Rural District Councils sat on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September in all the 57 Rural District Councils. Accounts differ as to what happened before, during and following the day on which nomination courts sat. What is clear is that at the end of the nomination period over half of the seats were retained unopposed by the ruling ZANU-PF and elections were scheduled in only six hundred and forty two of the wards of the wards.

The MDC alleges that most of its candidates were prevented from travelling to the Nomination Courts to submit their nomination papers.

In a report on the nomination process which was published in the week after the nomination, the MDC noted that their candidates were unable to be nominated as a result of among other reasons, last minute changes to ward boundaries; new and unpublicised requirement for a long birth certificates; intimidation; names not appearing on the voters' roll, early closure of nomination court, late submission of papers; candidates turned away on the way to the nomination court, violence at Nomination Court, disqualification of candidates because of non-payment of rates; insufficient transport allowances, nomination court sealed by war veterans; late arrival of nomination papers, last minute defections intimidation, wards sealed off by Zanu-PF supporters, arrests of candidates, evictions, and insufficient supporting documents, and insufficient number of nominees, defections, and no bus fares amongst others as well as insufficient nominees. ZANU-PF has however noted that the failure of the MDC to contest in all the wards is sign that they are disorganised and have not support base

whatsoever in the rural areas. That notwithstanding, there was a lot of intimidation of those who intended to stand as MDC candidates to the extent that even after nomination courts, some nominated MDC candidates fled their residencies. They were unable to campaign effectively, if at all, and in many cases, elections were held in the absence of at least one of the candidates.

In Ward 1 of Manyame District a candidate for Zanu-PF was duly nominated after a previous dismissal from council on charges of misconduct was lifted in unclear circumstances by the Minister of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing

### ***VOTER EDUCATION***

ZESN conducted voter education in all the areas where elections were being held. This was mainly in the form of material distribution as other more traditional methods of voter education such as public gatherings have become unsafe. At the same time members of ZESN were engaged in their continuous programmes of civic education using various methodologies.

However the political climate affects the ability to conduct voter education and this was seen during the election. Many voters were assisted, as they were not even aware what they needed to do once in the polling station. Observers who were in the polling stations recommend continuous and intensive voter education.

## **PRE-ELECTION**

### **CAMPAIGNING**

The campaign period was marred by the violence, intimidation and generally unsettled atmosphere which has characterised the Zimbabwe social and political scene since the 2000 Parliamentary Elections. This has been spearheaded by those individuals and organisations that are aligned to the ruling party as the annexure on campaign period incidences details. Zanu-PF members and supporters particularly the Women's and Youth League; Youth Militia trained for national service, war veterans and members of the Central Intelligence Organisation, the Zimbabwe National Army, the Zimbabwe Republic Police, the Zimbabwe Prison Service have all been implicated in the reports on violence received by ZESN. Traditional leaders particularly chiefs, sub-chiefs and kraal heads have now joined the fray (See Human Rights NGO Forum definition on violence)

The reports show that organised violence is still very much a part of politics in Zimbabwe and that whilst it changes in form and content depending on how near an election is, it is for the foreseeable future, here to stay. The most worrying aspect is that violence has become an accepted feature of political campaign. The land issue, the drought and the accompanying food crisis has provided an excellent opportunity for the ruling party to exploit the rural masses and manipulate voters into voting them back into power.

Reports abound of voters who were told that they would only receive food aid if they voted Zanu-PF into power. In the run-up to the September 2002 elections whilst cases of murder, attempted murder, unlawful detention and arrest and abduction declined in the month of August, whilst cases of political intimidation increasing in some parts of the country. This was obviously coinciding with the election.

### **Candidates**

Many prospective MDC candidates withdrew their candidature either as a result of the intimidation by supporters of the ruling party or as a result of direct obstruction by members of Zanu-PF and some allege, the office of the Registrar-General itself. This was in the form of direct threatening and intimidating behaviour against the candidates and or members of their families. This included forced job resignations, hostage situations, arson, banishment, and harassment and a dubious application the law on citizenship. Prospective candidates were also assaulted even before the holding of the nomination court.

On the day of the nomination courts some of the nomination centres were sealed off by Zanu-PF such nomination centres in Shamva and Murewa South. In Mhondoro at the nomination court for Chegutu Rural District Council, an MDC member of Parliament, some aspiring candidates and the MDC District Chairperson were the subject of intimidation and assault and some had their nomination papers destroyed by Zanu-PF supporters.

Complaints by MDC candidates continued over the campaign as they complained about continued harassment to the point where some who had been brave enough to be nominated withdrew their candidature. In Manicaland it was reported that over 100 of the nominated MDC candidates fled their homes in the run-up to the election. This obviously gave the ruling party an unfair campaigning advantage and denied the voters their right to hearing from all sides in any poll.

### **Voters**

The rights of voters, under assault since 2000, continued to be violated and eroded. Fearfulness in voters was deliberately cultivated in order to affect the way in which the voters were voting. Fear of hunger and fear of assault were too important emotions which were used mostly by the ruling party. It is not an exaggeration to say that a lot of those who went to vote did so not so much out of the desire to vote but out of a fear not to.

As always, misinformation and disinformation were important aspects of the administrative arrangements. In this election more than any other, there was poor information management and dissemination. As already mentioned, for an election of this magnitude, the inspection of the voters rolls was very poorly publicised. The notices appeared in one national newspaper only twice. Given the fact that the national newspaper are not widely disseminated, this is not a desirable arrangement.

On failing to find their names in the voters' roll on election day, many voters complained that they had not know about the election and the inspection. Some expressed shock on not finding their names in the voters' rolls as they had voted in the March 2002 election. Furthermore lack of information was so apathetic that some voters only found out about the poll when they went shopping or went to church. Even in an environment where voters have now become apathetic and disinterested this is quite simply not good enough.

Thus whilst voters always have the final choice of whether they want to vote or not, electoral authorities should be prepared for all eventualities. One Zanu-PF candidate noted that the electoral authorities appeared not to be prepared for the election. This was when his polling agents failed to be accredited at Chewumba School in Hwange because the presiding officer did not have the necessary forms for accreditation.

### **The Public**

Even those in non voting areas were denied the right to information about the election and as the Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe has shown, they were also denied the right to non-partisan reporting about the election.

## VOTING DAYS

The voting day dawned with those who knew about the election looking forward to an opportunity to cast their vote for their chosen candidate. In most cases they were able to do this but in some cases administrative hiccups meant that voters were inconvenienced to the extent where some gave up in the attempt.

In Masvingo province, many polling stations opened late on the first day of voting as a result of the late arrival of voting materials which was caused by a shortage of vehicles and a fuel shortage. Thus most of the polling stations where observers were deployed opened late and some voters became impatient and left the polling stations before the voting materials arrived. There was no compensatory extension of the voting period.

In Hurungwe West Ward 10 of the Hurungwe Rural District Council ballot papers for the ward 10 election were finished at Charles Clark Primary School by 1100hrs on the first day. Voters in the queue were told to go home until more ballot papers arrived which they did later on in the afternoon. However given the heat and distances that villagers have to walk it is difficult to imagine that *all* who had been in the queue made a second attempt to vote. Ballot papers also had to be replenished at the other polling station in the ward, Maumbe Primary School. Ink detectors presented problems in some stations although this problem was easily rectified. In some polling stations ballot papers were torn or missing from the ballot books. Three cases are recorded of marked voting instructions in the ballot booths which were removed by the polling officials.

In Matobo District of Matabeleland South, Mbuya Primary School was 19 kms away from some of the voters who complained that whoever was responsible for the selection of the polling station clearly did not have the interests of the voters at heart. At Musenampongo polling station in Binga on the first day voters who were in the queue at the end of voting were not allowed to vote. The explanation given was that it was because it was a mobile polling station and presumably had to move on to the next site. Voters near Matetsi Road Camp in Matabeleland North were confused about whether the station would be available on the first or second day of voting. Again there is no guarantee that those who tried to vote on the first day made an attempt on the second day. There were a number of unpublicised polling stations which appeared on the first day of polling which were not on the list supplied to ZESN.

The high number of assisted voters is also indicative of two things. Firstly some people ask for assistance so that they can tell polling agents who they want to vote and therefore leave no doubt as to their support for a particular candidate or party. Secondly there are a number of voters who are functionally illiterate and many who are electorally illiterate. That is they know very little about the electoral process and also the voting process.

Voters had two main problems in checking the voters' roll. The first was that many came expecting to vote and could not find their names in the voters' roll. This includes people who had voted in the March presidential election and those who had not registered or inspected the voters' roll. Some people below the voting age of eighteen also tried to vote.

A number of polling stations had members of the ruling party camped at the entrances to the polling stations. These were mostly youth wearing party regalia (mostly Zanu-PF) that would scrutinise and monitor those entering the polling station and in some cases tell them whom to vote for. At some stations the monitoring continued after voters had left the polling station with some voters reporting that their names were taken down in order to facilitate easier access to food aid. So for some voting was a way of trying to ease hunger rather than exercising a political right. In some cases the youth took down the number plates of all vehicles particularly those of observers entering the polling station.

Some observers noted reluctance on the part of some of the electoral authorities to act on those committing electoral offences. The police is recorded as having been relatively diligent in dealing with political party supporters violating the 100m rule and also the rule against wearing party attire in the polling station. Some voters were arrested and some were simply

chased away from the polling stations. There needs to be one uniform application of the law as there were different sanctions for the same offence.

Some voters also presented problems to the presiding officers and the police by attempting to vote twice or engaging in inappropriate behaviour such as attempting to vote without wearing a shirt (recorded twice). Again there were different penalties for the same offence.

The number of polling agents was not uniform by polling station or by candidate. That is to say that the number of polling agents per candidate per polling station ranges from 0-6. Some polling stations had no party agents. Zanu-PF invariably had more party agents per polling station than MDC with some polling stations having Zanu-PF agents only. In a few cases the number for the MDC was higher. This has been attributed to a number of factors. According to the state media the unavailability of polling agents was caused by the non-payment of allowances for previous elections. MDC counters this with the allegation that many of their polling agents were intimidated out of and prevented from participating in the election by Zanu-PF supporters.

Observers and media reports (Daily News 3 October 2002) have also noted that at some polling stations and in the minds of some voters the relation between voting itself, voting for Zanu-PF and receiving food aid was clearly established. The youth at some stations would take down the names of those that had voted and promise them food aid. The private press also reported that some voters were seen receiving food aid after coming out of the polling stations and some food distribution points were located conveniently close to the polling station.

### **Counting of Votes**

Counting of votes for all the local authority elections and the Hurungwe West Parliamentary By-election began on Monday 30 September 2002. Counting was conducted at district level. The times of beginning and ending counting varied for all the districts and the Hurungwe West By-Election.

The end of counting varied mostly from the early afternoon to the past eleven o'clock on the night of the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2002. This was largely the case except for Matabeleland North where some boxes arrived at the counting centres at 1700hrs.

There were no significant problems except some disputes about what could be classified as a spoilt paper. In Kadoma the observer was initially not allowed to enter into the counting but was later cleared. In ward 16 of the same district, the independent candidate wanted counting to stop as she alleged that one of the polling officials was a party(not identified) official. The counting however continued.

Generally the counting proceeded well. There were some counting centres that had no observers or opposition party agents. This was because some of the MDC agents were chased away from the counting and some observers were either not allowed to enter counting centres or there were not enough accredited observers.

Results were announced in the counting centres and have also been published in the print media. However it is of concern that not all the results have been published and the district results which were announced on ZTV on Wednesday 2 October do not tally. As such the official results remain the exclusive property of the Registrar-General's office so far.

### **Accreditation of Observers**

Names of observers were submitted to the Ministry of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs on the 6<sup>th</sup> of September 2002. On Tuesday 19 September 2002, we were advised that the final list of polling stations was out and that observers will be deployed at a ratio of one per two polling stations and we were required to amend the lists that we had made to suit this ratio. We proceeded to do this. On Thursday 19 September we were advised that names should now be submitted straight from the member organisations themselves and we

proceeded to separate our lists by organisation, submitted them to the organisations and requested organisations to submit them themselves which they did.

Of the fourteen organisations which submitted One was not accredited, that is the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA). Meanwhile the ESC advertised accreditation of observers from Friday 20 September 2002 to end Thursday 26 September 2002. Contacting observers within the short notice of receiving invitations and bringing them to Harare for accreditation before the deadline with some based in remote areas where there are no communication channels and poor transport networks was a nightmare. ZESN negotiated with the ESC for the extension of the deadline for accreditation of observers, which they did, up to Saturday 28 September 2002.

This notwithstanding, only about a quarter of those observers who had been invited for accreditation managed to come to Harare for accreditation. Some came from as far as Binga and Beitbridge. Observers were still being accredited as polling began and some only arrived in their polling stations on the second day of polling. In the end only 217 observers were accredited.

Once the observers had been accredited and deployed, they made their way into the polling stations. However for most of them, the nightmare continued. Whilst some presiding officers welcomed and accepted the observers, most were hostile accepting observers reluctantly in some cases and refusing them entry into the polling stations in others. Some observers have commented on the welcome response that they received and the cordial atmosphere in which they worked. In other instances, presiding officers professed ignorance about any observers. Only after intervention by members of the ESC and the ward and constituency (Hurungwe West) registrars were observers allowed in some polling stations. Some observers were not allowed by presiding officers to stay in the polling stations permanently and had to move in and out of the stations. For some the presiding officers refused to share information referring the observers to the registrars. Still there were instances where accredited observers was banished to the 100m boundary and had to rely on information coming from the voters.

Presiding officers reported that there was no mention of observers on the instruction given to them regarding those who should legally be in the polling stations. The whole *issue* of observers from the selection process itself, the processing of names the accreditation in terms of time and location and the role and duties of the observers vis a vis other persons present in the polling station was shrouded in mystery and confusion. It is not clear whether this was deliberate or whether it was another sign of administrative incompetence on the part of the Ministry of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs, the office of the Registrar-General and the Electoral Supervisory Commission.

Experience suggests that it was a bit of both. Every major election from the Parliamentary General Election of June 2000 to the Presidential Election in March 2002 and the Local Authority Elections themselves has been accompanied by ambiguity as far the issue of monitors and observers is concerned. On one hand the state appears to want observers in order to legitimise and/or validate election results. On the other hand the state seeks to control the form and content of both foreign and domestic observation to the point where the situation becomes farcical and would be ultimately ineffectual. There is need for all the groups involved in observation including the domestic observation groups, foreign observers, government officials and electoral authorities to agree on what observation is and means to them and to finally resolve it is desirable for Zimbabwe or not. This may go some way in avoiding the incessant problems that have bedevilled the observation and monitoring of elections in Zimbabwe particularly in the recent past.

## **THE MEDIA**

**Please note this media report is mainly based on the Weekly Media Updates produced by the Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe (MMPZ)**

As in all recent elections, the conduct of the media left a great deal to be desired. Inviting particular censure was the state owned print and electronic media that once again went out of its way to show its support for the ruling party. The media, public and private, displayed their partisanship clearly with the privately owned print media invariably focusing on those stories which showed the government and the ruling party in a bad light particularly the stories about the nomination courts and the violence which accompanied the election. The opposite was true for the public media which in its election reporting focused on those stories praising the ruling party and seized every opportunity to attack the MDC. The public media invariably used Zanu-PF supporters as sources for its stories whilst the private media quoted mostly those aligned with the MDC.

### **The Voting Process**

Reporting on the technical and administrative aspects was minimal in both the private and public media. For instance reporting about the voters' roll was in essence a summarisation of the adverts which appeared (only in the public print media) publicising the exercise. There was little real analysis of the process of inspection and registration and the shortcomings in the arrangements for this event as far as the office of the Registrar-General was concerned. In fact the deeper analysis was to be found in the press statements and advertisements placed by civic organisations. The media did not fully investigate the anomalies that these statements alluded to. There was little information about how to vote, when to vote and where to vote. There was little voter information (and education ) provided by any sections of the media.

### **Campaigning**

Reporting on the actual campaigning process particularly the holding of rallies and campaigns again displayed the partisanship in the media. The private media focused on those stories showing how MDC candidates were not able or allowed to hold their campaign meetings because of threats and intimidation. The public media on the other hand was concerned with meetings held in election areas where Zanu-PF used food aid and the land redistribution programme for political mileage. The short-wave radio station SW Radio Africa however reported this as bribery of voters by Zanu-PF

In the final week of the campaign the MDC petitioned the court for a postponement of the elections. The private media highlighted the violence and anomalies at the nomination court which led to the petition whilst the public media derided the MDC for going to the courts to avoid a certain defeat. Once the court delivered its ruling the public media gloried in the decision to dismiss the application saying this was a sign that the MDC was frivolous and disorganised.

In both the private and public media, there was no reporting on the independent candidates except in the announcement of the results.

### **Political Violence**

The private media reported a great deal on election-related violence mostly allegedly perpetrated by Zanu-PF supporters against MDC members and supporters. The public media did not report as much on political violence but when it did the reporting focused on acts of violence committed by supporters of the MDC against supporters of the ruling party. Most of the violence related reporting from ZBC for instance focused on official denials of the allegations. Even when there was suggestion that there could be violence it was not investigated. In effect the public media largely ignored the allegations of violence including the Daily News' photographic evidence of the violence.

### **Voting and Counting Period**

The public media attempted to vindicate itself during the polling period by reporting that the polls were peaceful and ended peacefully. This was highly disturbing and confusing particularly when the two headlines “Polls end peacefully” (The Herald 30 September 2002) and “Chaos, Threats mar rural councils elections” (Daily News 30 September 2002) are placed side by side. In light of the overwhelming evidence that there was violence related to these polls the public media’s focus only the voting period was an abrogation of their duty to inform the public without fear or favour particularly since they **are** owned by the public.

The public media made no allusions to the fact that a significant of polling stations particularly in Masvingo opened late and the voter apathy displayed in this election should be a matter of serious concern to all the participants in the election irrespective of whether they won or not. The Daily News reported on 3 October 2002 that Zanu-PF officials gave food aid to the voters they had assisted. There were reports in the private media that Zanu-PF was bussing in voters in Matabeleland and was preventing MDC aligned persons to voter in Tsholotsho. There were no similar reports in the public media.

### **The Results**

Given the fact that very few people voted in these elections and that the main reason why many MDC candidates were not nominated as candidates was because of violence and intimidation and not for lack of support, the public media’s acclaim over the results as a show of Zanu-PF’s supremacy is of great concern. In its reporting on the results, there was no real analysis of what the results actual mean for the ordinary person and there was no in-depth analysis by the public media of the conditions in which the results were achieved and which may have affected the election outcome.

The private media houses on the other hand condemned the results of what they deemed a fraudulent election and in fact rejected them as a reflection of the true will of Zimbabweans.

### **Conclusion**

What this summary shows is that the media in Zimbabwe is and remains divided and that Zimbabweans have some way to go before they can have access to a media that is reasonably impartial in its reporting

## **POST-ELECTION PERIOD**

Election related events in the post –election period have clearly shown that the political polarisation within Zimbabwean society. Zanu-PF and those aligned to it including the public media and certain political analysts continues to claim the election results as a clear and present sign that Zanu-PF is the dominant political force. Meanwhile the MDC and its supporters bemoan the election loss and cry foul at the manner in which Zanu-PF's election victory was achieved.

Reports in the private media are continuing to highlight the irregularities and anomalies associated with the elections. Examples include the report which appeared in the Daily News on 3 October 2002 about the vote buying that Zanu-PF is alleged to have engaged in in Chimanimani.

Reports from Binga are that government sanctioned retribution against those areas which supported the MDC in the just-ended polls has now begun. This includes a report in the Daily News of 15 October 2002 that the family of a man perceived to be an MDC supporter lost 27 goats in an arson attack made by suspected ruling party supporters. The winning candidate in this ward has also reportedly had his house burnt down. The same paper reports on the 16<sup>th</sup> of October that the government's ban on food distribution by Save the Children UK has resulted in the death of two villagers. In Kamativi a winning MDC councillor is reported to be fighting for his life in hospital after being attacked by Zanu-PF supporters. This was following threats from war veterans who were angered at his victory over a Zanu-PF candidate in the polls. Similar reports have also come from Lupane and Masvingo

## **CONCLUSION**

The real winner in these elections was voter apathy. Voter turnout, which had begun to rise with the constitutional referendum in February 2000 through the June 2000 Parliamentary Election and peaking with the March 2002 election, was very low. This can be attributed to many factors including the election related violence and intimidation; despondency following the results of the March 2002 presidential election, the economic crisis and the spectre of the impending famine. Clearly the citizens have lost faith in elections as a tool that they themselves can use to effect real material changes in their lives. The challenge is for all political parties and civic organisations to show that indeed elections have the potential to change lives and for the better.

## **ANNEXURES**

1. Original Schedule of Local Authority Elections
2. Campaign Period Incidences
3. Results of Nomination Court
4. Polling Station Statistics
5. Results as Announced by Registrar-General
6. Results by Candidate

**Please note that these statistics are still being collected and finalised**