

Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN)



Pre-election Update No. 1

24 November to 14 December 2007

The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) is observing the pre-election period of the synchronized 2008 elections that are scheduled for March. ZESN trained and deployed 120 long-term observers who are monitoring election related events in the existing 120 parliamentary constituencies. This report covers events that took place between November 24 and 14 December 2007.

Methodology

This report is based on the first hand observations made by the trained ZESN long-term observers. It also based on media reports, observations of the ZESN secretariat and feedback from members of the public attending ZESN community workshops countrywide.

(i) General political situation

The general political situation during this period was peaceful and calm with the major election related activity being the 'million man' solidarity march organised by war veterans in support of President Mugabe's candidature.

During this period President Mugabe reiterated that election observers from the so-called 'unfriendly' countries would not be allowed to observe the 2008 elections. The ZANU PF party also held its extraordinary congress where the president announced that elections would be held in March but did not disclose the actual date. He urged his party supporters to shun violence and avoid vote buying. The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission also announced the preliminary results of the delimitation exercise.

(ii) The political campaign

Political campaigns, though still low key, have started countrywide. ZESN observers in Harare, Mashonaland East and West reported cases of violence and coercion during the mobilisation of marchers for the 'million man' march. ZESN has not received reports of campaign meetings being disrupted. Both ZANU PF and the MDC are holding campaign meetings throughout the country. ZESN observers did not report on any campaign meetings being held by the United People's Party (UPP) or any other opposition party. ZESN observers reported that the MDC (Morgan Tsvangirai) has been campaigning in rural Midlands and Mashonaland East. Tsvangirai also held a rally in Nkayi, the MDC pro-senate's stronghold, where he called for the reunification of his party. A similar rally was held in Redcliff. There were no reports of violence at these two meetings.

(iii) **Election administration**

Following the adoption of the Constitutional Amendment No. 18, which also thrust the responsibility of constituency demarcation to the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission¹ (ZEC), the commission proceeded to set up delimitation committees countrywide. The opposition MDC has condemned this action arguing that it is not in the spirit of the ongoing talks between ZANU PF and MDC to continue with the delimitation exercise before the ZEC is reconstituted.

The ZEC has since announced that constituencies for the 2008 elections will be as follows:

Province	Number of Constituencies Allocated	Number of previous Constituencies	Percentage increase	Registered Voters
Harare	29	18	61.1	766 478
Mashonaland West	22	13	69.2	583 503
Mashonaland East	23	13	76.9	624 638
Mashonaland Central	18	10	80.0	488 477
Midlands	28	16	75	739 502
Manicaland	28	15	86.6	709 664
Bulawayo	12	7	71.4	313 459
Matabeleland North	13	7	85.7	345 263
Matabeleland South	13	7	85.7	342 280
Masvingo	26	14	85.7	699 200
Zimbabwe	210	120	75	5 612 464

It is still unclear whether the existing provincial boundaries will be maintained or will be adjusted.² The results of this delimitation exercise should not, however, be read in isolation of the mobile voter registration exercises that were conducted between June and November 2007. It is important to note that in spite of having been allocated the biggest number of constituencies Harare recorded the lowest number of percentage increase in the number of constituencies. Whereas Masvingo and the Midlands have recorded high percentage increases in the number of constituencies, it is most likely that the majority of the registered voters will be in the rural areas as the major urban centers in these provinces Kwekwe, Gweru and Masvingo were left out of the initial voter registration exercise.

¹ Before the Amendment this was the responsibility of a specially established Delimitation Commission.

² The Minister of Local Government and Urban Development, in April 2007 said that the boundaries for Harare Metropolitan province would be extended to cover parts of Mashonaland East, Central and West provinces. He also indicated that the same exercise would be carried out in the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province.

The ZEC has established delimitation committees countrywide. These committees have been holding countrywide consultative meetings. These meetings have been open to political parties, civic organisations and individuals. ZESN observers in Chitungwiza, Insiza, Marondera West, Bulawayo East and Mutoko South had different opinions. The Chitungwiza observer felt that the exercise was useful and met all the stakeholders' expectations. On the contrary, the Marondera West observer reported that the exercise was a lecture that concentrated on informing the people on the general role of the ZEC in elections. ZESN will continue to monitor the exercise in order to assess whether the input made by the invited stakeholders are being taken aboard.

(iv) Voter registration

Voter registration is still continuing at static centers, albeit at a slow pace. The ZESN observer for Highfield reported that registration officials at Machipisa are serving only 40 people per day leaving a lot of people unattended to. Voter registration only starts at 1400hrs at this center.

In Chitungwiza the ZESN observer reported that there has been no specific person assigned to conduct voter registration and those intending to register are asked to join the same queue as other people seeking identification documents. In Sanyati the registration officials indicated that they did not have photographic films and were thus unable to issue new identity cards. The same was reported in Masvingo and Chiredzi where the registration officials were not registering people citing the lack of stationery. This means that most prospective voters in Masvingo might not be able to participate in the elections as they were also left out during the mobile voter registration.³ ZESN observers have reported that voter registration is allocated only two hours in Masvingo.

There were also allegations of discrimination against youthful prospective voters being registered. ZESN observers reported that the assistant District Administrator for Zaka refused one youth the right to register citing the absence of proof of residence. He however allowed several elderly people to register without the same.

ZESN believes that the exercise risks becoming a cosmetic exercise unless it is adequately resourced and given the prominence it deserves.

(v) Voter and Civic Education

Except for Mvuma constituency, none of the ZESN observers reported on any voter education activity being conducted by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC). This is the body mandated by the Constitution to carry out this task. The ZESN Harare Central observer also reported that a theatre group, Vhitori Entertainment was carrying out theatre performances where it was encouraging people to register as voters.

During this period ZESN however conducted 35 community workshops countrywide.

³ In the initial mobile voter registration exercise ZESN raised concern saying that Masvingo, Gweru and Kwekwe were not catered for in the exercise. In spite of this, Masvingo town was still not catered for in the second exercise, with the Registrar General choosing to register voters in the rural part of Masvingo Central constituency. In Kwekwe registration was only done at only two centers for only six days notwithstanding that Kwekwe is the fifth largest city in Zimbabwe.

(vi) Use of Public Resources

ZESN observers witnessed cases of misuse of public resources particularly during the 'million man' march. There were reports of at least two motor vehicles belonging to the Chitungwiza Town Council being used to ferry ZANU PF supporters to the 'million man' march. ZESN observers in Mashonaland East, Central and Harare also reported seeing ZUPCO buses ferrying people to Harare for the march. Observers in Hwange and Bulawayo also reported that the National Railways of Zimbabwe (NRZ) were also used for a similar purpose. ZESN could not ascertain whether ZANU PF paid for the use of these buses and trains.

ZESN observers also reported on cases of politicization of state functions to the benefit of the ruling party. There were reports that in Hwedza and Chiredzi North participants at a meeting to donate ox-drawn ploughs to poor villagers were made to chant ZANU PF slogans. In Masvingo Central constituency at Roger Howmann Hall the ploughs were only allocated to people who held a fully paid up ZANU PF membership card and could chant correctly at least three of the party's slogans. ZESN observers in Gokwe Sengwa, Chivi North, Mutare South have reported the partisan distribution of Operation Maguta (a government farming programme coordinated by the Zimbabwe National Army) inputs to members of the ruling party.

ZESN observers also reported that the District Administrator for Gokwe Nembudziya, one Mr Mutikizizi assured people who had been given ploughs at Mutora that they would not repay the loan if the ruling party won the election.

(vii) Undue influence on or intimidation of voters

The Masvingo Provincial Governor Willard Chiwewe is alleged to have stated that the ox-drawn ploughs donated to poor peasants would be withdrawn if ZANU PF lost in the elections. In Zaka West a local councilor warned opposition supporters that they would be 'bitten by dogs' if they supported the MDC. ZESN observers in Hopley, Harare South reported an incident of at least one person who was assaulted after he refused to attend the 'million man' march.

In Mutasa North two men were harassed and intimidated for organizing an MDC rally and pitching up MDC posters.

(viii) NGO activities

Civil society organisations have been playing a role in trying to improve participation in next year's elections. In the Midlands organisations such as CIVNET and the CCJP have been very active. However the Christian Alliance had its meeting disrupted in Mvuma by alleged ZANU PF supporters. The CIVNET is talking about the importance of participation with the CCJP carrying out peace building initiatives.

The ZESN observer for St Mary's reported that the Crisis Coalition held a 'Rock Da Vote' musical concert in Chitungwiza on 24 November 2007. The organisation was urging the youths in Chitungwiza to register as voters. The Women's Trust held two workshops urging women's participation in the elections.

At one CARE food distribution meeting at Dekeza Township in Zaka West, the councilor warned people against NGOs as they were fronts for the opposition MDC.

(ix) Security forces

ZESN observers in Mutasa North reported that the police, soldiers and members of the CIO disrupted an MDC rally for 30minutes. The rally only proceeded after they were shown the police clearance letter. The police also allegedly refused to sanction an MDC meeting at Hauna Growth Point citing the provisions of POSA.

In Hopley, Harare two policemen witnessed the assault of a man who was being forced to go and attend the 'million man' march by youths who were dressed in ZANU PF regalia. The police did not take any action until the man fled for his own safety.

(x) Traditional leaders

Traditional leaders in Silobela, Chief Gobo and Ruya, are alleged to have indicated that they do not welcome opposition supporters in their fiefdoms. Observers in Nyanga reported that Chief Chifodya is openly campaigning for the ruling party. ZESN observers however reported of other traditional leaders playing a role in encouraging people to register as voters without indicating how they wanted them to vote.

Recommendations

Having observed the pre-election so far ZESN makes the following recommendations in order to enhance the possibility of holding free and fair elections:

- There is a great need to ensure that adequate resources, i.e. time, human and financial resources are allocated towards the voter registration exercise in order to ensure that everyone who desires to participate in the 2008 election is able to do so.
- Both the Registrar General and the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission should play a more pro-active role to ensure that every eligible voter is registered instead of making the process slow and frustrating for aspiring voters.
- The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission should ensure that the Registrar General assigns full-time staff to register all aspiring voters at all his offices countrywide.
- There is need for the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission and all other relevant stakeholders to embark on an intensive countrywide voter education exercise
- Political parties should desist from manipulating state functions and resources for political gain
- Political parties should maintain the spirit of non-violence in election campaigns
- Traditional leaders should remain apolitical and should embrace all their subjects regardless of their political persuasion. They should allow their subjects to exercise their freedom of choice and association.
- Security forces should still conduct themselves in a professional and non-partisan manner and should not serve the interests of individual political parties.

Conclusion

ZESN urges the people of Zimbabwe to maintain the prevailing high levels of political tolerance and desist from unwarranted political violence.