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Voter Registration – Chairperson Makarau**



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Voter Reg Centres: 'Strategic allocation'?

ZEC to Improve Voter Registration – Chairperson Makarau

ZIMBABWE Electoral Commission (ZEC) has admitted that the initial mobile voter registration which ended on May 19 was “fraught with challenges”, although Chairperson Justice Rita Makarau hastily pledged to improve the exercise addressing a consultative meeting with members of the civil society on Thursday June 6 in Harare.

ZEC was scheduled to begin a 30-day mobile voter registration on Monday June 10 to satisfy requirements in the new Consti-

tution and has since complied as mobile voter registration is currently underway at various centers.

The Constitutional Court ruled on May 31 that the next election should be held by July 31 which analysts say makes the preparation for free and fair elections squeezed for time given the need for ZEC and the Registrar of Voters’ office to prepare a credible voters’ roll.

As agreed by SADC Heads of State and Government on the sidelines of the African Union (AU) Golden Jubilee in Addis Ababa in Ethiopia, SADC might hold a Summit on Zimbabwe in Mozambican

capital Maputo this week.

Analysts believe the Summit could assess the preparations for elections.

Justice Rita Makarau, the ZEC chairperson addressed members of the civil society alongside other commissioners and the Registrar of Voters Tobaiwa Mudede.

“We want this to be a credible election so we have held this meeting because a credible election requires consultation,” said Justice Makarau, admitting on behalf of ZEC that there were flaws in the previous exercise:



File picture of queues on election day in Zimbabwe

“We realized that exercise was fraught with challenges.

“We thought we could invite you to share what we have done to deal with those challenges.”

The ZEC chairperson admitted to flaws that were identified by civil society organisations such as Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) and Election Resource Centre (ERC) among others.

Flaws ranged from lack of adequate publicity to inconsistencies with the regulations in the conduct of ZEC teams as well as inaccessibility of the mobile registration points.

Makarau said to plug some of the gaps they had conducted synchronized training of staff with the Registrar of Voters’ office for the voter educators who have since been deployed in pairs to the 1958 wards across the country.



Justice Rita Makarau, ZEC chairperson

The Commission said people living with disabilities had been considered in the recruitment which it said was guided by the Public Service Commission (PSC) in liaison with the National Association of Societies for the Care of the Disabled (NASCOH) – the organisation which is also assisting with necessary aids for the sector in the registration.

Makarau said those without proofs of residence would be required as a “last resort” to sign sworn affidavits that are obtainable at the registration centres before ZEC Commissioners of Oaths.

ZEC said it was also using schools to distribute information to the rural communities through pupils.

Makarau encouraged those who have concerns to approach ZEC but when asked whether the Commission would allow civil society to educate voters she could only disclose that applications from the organisations were still under consideration without giving further detail.

“Voter education and voter inspection will run concurrently.

“While registration of first time voters is going on all those who have voted before are expected to inspect their names on the roll.

“Voter inspection is free,” Makarau said.

Mudede said efforts were underway to deal with the issue of aliens who are eligible to vote as dictated by the new Constitution.

He indicated that there was no open door policy for all aliens except those who match the relaxed requirements, particularly clarifying on aliens of SADC origin.

"We consider the issue of residence, no one can just come from SADC and say I belong to Zimbabwe the question of citizenship is important," said Mudede.

Roselyn Hanzi of Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR) inquired from the Registrar of Voters whether Zimbabwe would comply with the African Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) ruling that the Zimbabweans in the diaspora must be allowed to vote.

"We have debated this issue; there is nothing of the resolution that relates to that issue. We have rejected it.

"We are not dictated to by the AU in handling our citizenship," Mudede said.

Prof. Geoff Feltoe, a commissioner of ZEC said the current law only provided for special voting arrangements for members of the Zimbabwean security forces deployed outside their wards and citizens working at Zimbabwean embassies in other countries.

Voter Registration Improves But...

CIVIL society has said that the mobile voter registration which commenced on Monday shows signs of improvement from the exercise which ended on May 19, but the sector has said there are still areas that need urgent attention.

Rindai Chupfunde-Vava, the director of Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) said they still noticed hindrances for those who want to register as voters.

"There are very few centers and these are moving around.

"They will not be in the wards for 30 days which reduces accessibility," the ZESN Director said.

Bulawayo Progressive Residents Association (BPRA) posted on the social network Twitter on Tuesday, the second day of mobile voter registration that:

"Many people seeking to be registered as voters are being turned away over proof of residence."



Thabani Nyoni

Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition Spokesperson Thabani Nyoni told the Crisis Report on Tuesday 11 June, that efforts to have mobile voter registration are commendable although there are some areas of concern.

"We do appreciate the initiative to restart the mobile voter registration especially considering the previous process was fraught with irregularities.

"What is of concern is that it is not clear for how long this process will be conducted and we have not quite seen the voter educators going around in areas.

"We are also worried that the Registrar General is changing the process logistically into clustering of wards.

The Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition is a broad based civil society network of over 72 active members comprising churches, women's groups, social movements, residents associations, labour unions, human rights lawyers, and health professionals. It was formed in August of 2001 to focus on democracy, human rights, good governance and sustainable development issues – working locally, regionally and internationally.

“Apart from that we do not know to what extent the process was funded with the Finance Minister saying he released US\$25 million, ZEC Chairperson is saying they received US \$13 million while the Registrar General of Voters acknowledges only US\$4 million,” said the Crisis spokesperson.

Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU) President Pride Mkono said:

“We are disappointed that there is not even one of the 48 state tertiary institutions with a mobile voter registration center.

“However we are urging students to defy the odds to go and register to vote.”

Election Resource Centre (ERC) Director Tawanda Chimhini revealed that they have been watching whether the positives witnessed in the first phase which ended in May have been maintained.



ERC Director Tawanda Chimhini

The ERC Director said they were also gauging measures which have been put in place toward addressing the challenges that were identified.

“We are happy about the advance publication of the timetable and schedule of mobile voter registration, though we are not saying the centers are accessible.

“We are also happy about the advance deployment of voter educators, though we believe the numbers are inadequate.

“The print and broadcasting media are doing a great job of complementing the process because they are trying to raise awareness,” said Chimhini.

Chimhini said civil society was aware of the “troubled” history of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) but was pleased by the attempt to improve the conduct of election preparations by ZEC under “difficult circumstances”.

On May 31 the constitutional court ruled that elections should be held by July 31 – many analysts have said the court ruling puts ZEC under pressure because of limited time.

According to the new Constitution, ZEC needs to deal with important election preparation processes such voter registration and cleaning and inspection of the voters’ roll.

ZEC last week held a consultative meeting with civil society, the media and political parties in Harare.

The ERC commended ZEC for “breaking with the tradition of secrecy”.

“We are supportive of the Commission. We are starting to see an attempt by the Commission to be transparent under difficult circumstances.

“We hope that we will have a more transparent election process in Zimbabwe and that ZEC will ensure that we have a transparent election process there is need to ensure that we have a credible voters’ roll,” Said Chimhini.

Voter Reg Centres: 'Strategic allocation'?

THE Election Resource Centre (ERC) Director Tawanda Chimhini has raised concerns about how allocation of voter registration centers has been conducted in parts of the country in the two phases of mobile voter registration.

Chimhini argued the way the registration centers were allocated in the country revealed that there had not been consideration of population density and distribution as guided by the National Population Census conducted in 2011.

"We are not seeing deliberate deployment of more registration centers in those areas where most people are expected to be in need of them," the ERC Director said.

Chimhini particularly noted the discrepancies in the clustering of wards to which the Registrar General has resorted on the basis that there will not be enough funds to conduct ward-based mobile voter registration.

"The clustering of wards might cause congestion and make people lose heart and go away.

"For instance, three wards in Harare which are: ward 27, ward 28 and ward 29 have been congested under Glenview A Community Center registration point which will only operate for five days.

"However the clustering is not consistent because ward 1 in Harare South has been awarded 5 centers which will be operating for close to 14 days.

"You get a feeling there is a strategic allocation of centers to influence the number of people who register in particular areas," said Chimhini.

The ERC director said the impact of allocation of registration centers had been noticed in the previous exercise, which ended in May.

"In the last exercise the least number of registration centers were in Bulawayo which also recorded the least number of new registered voters.

"Mashonaland East had the most registration centers and it recorded the biggest number of new registered voters.

"There was a correlation between the number of registered voters and the number of registration centers

and access of those points was a key factor," said Chimhini.

The Registrar-General of Voters Tobaiwa Mudede reportedly indicated that the voter registration could run for less than the 30-days prescribed in the new Constitution due to financial constraints that could affect those areas with fewer registration centers.



Registrar-General of Voters Tobaiwa Mudede

Chimhini said that Mashonaland West had replaced Mashonaland East as the province with most mobile voter registration centers with 439 centers and this meant that there was a likelihood the highest number of new registered voters will be recorded in the province.

Two populous urban centers Bulawayo and Harare have been allocated 36 and 44 centers respectively that Chimhini said meant that there will be congestion, slow registration and long queues in the two cities.

The ERC director predicted that the fact that registration centers had increased from 623 to 2952 countrywide implied that more people would be registered than the 200 441 registered in the first exercise.