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ZEC ignored civil society call



Unmasking unethical electoral practices

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FOLLOWING the announcement by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) that the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (Zanu-PF) ostensibly won the 2013 harmonized elections by a two thirds majority, civil society organisations have reiterated their demand for a democratic society amid doubts about the fairness of the plebiscite.



R.G.Mugabe declared by ZEC as the winner of the July 31st Presidential election

The proclamation by ZEC on Saturday, August 3, that one of the principals in the Government of National Unity President Robert Mugabe had prevailed over his opponents by 61% of the vote coincided with reports by the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN), the African Union (AU) and the Southern Afri-

can Development Community (SADC) observer missions who unequivocally stated that there were irregularities.

These concerns around irregularities are likely to spill to the courts since one of the aggrieved parties the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) led by Morgan Tsvangirai threatened to challenge the outcome amid concerns that the election was massively manipulated. Civil society is adamant that the matter of who won the election did not cloud the genuine matters related to calls for a democratic and progressive society in Zimbabwe.

Nhlanhla Ngwenya, the director of Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) Zimbabwe Chapter, said civil society demands were sound. MISA-Zimbabwe has been campaigning against partisan state media, an issue that was also raised as denting the 2013 election in the preliminary reports issued by several electoral observer missions.

"It doesn't really matter who takes over, we feel that these demands are just and legitimate.

"Our demands remain a constant because we are pursuing a noble aspiration and human dignity," he said.

Ngwenya said in the case of MISA-Zimbabwe Chapter they would continue to ask government to allow the people to access vital information about the government so as to foster accountability as well as to uphold freedom of expression and journalistic freedom which he said should be the same with all other sectors.



Over 3 Million Zimbabweans are said to have voted in the July 31st election

Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC) Spokesperson Thabani Nyoni said the election outcome as announced by ZEC did not sanction the next government to be insensitive to the issues of those Zimbabweans who were not in favour of the ruling party.

“Zanu-Pf will be expected to behave like a government not a political party. They will still have to consult those who did not vote for them, they will still have to listen to the concerns of those who did not vote for them,” he said.

Nyoni added that civil society should engage with communities to monitor the actual delivery of the next government based on the ruling party’s promises, whilst emphasizing that the culture of friendly debate and peaceful citizen participation should be immortalized as it was vital for Zimbabwe to reach its full potential.

ZEC ignored civil society call

THE Research and Advocacy Unit (RAU) has said that the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) was aware of the problems that hampered the credibility of the 2013 harmonized elections after being warned by civil society.

There were no efforts to address the issues raised until the Election Day, causing split views on the credibility of the election, RAU said.

Tony Reeler, the director of RAU, was speaking at the Transparency International –Zimbabwe (TIZ) organized public discussion on July 31 elections post mortem held at the SAPES Trust in Harare on Tuesday, August 6.

RAU said there would be strong doubts that the 2013 harmonized election met the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections and the African Charter on democracy, elections and Governance until ZEC released all the information related to the election for a transparent audit.

"We have gone from crisis back to crisis in my view. We now have split views about the acceptability of our elections and that is a very sad outcome after painful five years under the stewardship of an inclusive Government.

"A couple of steps are really important in the immediate weeks if you want to deal with this crisis. Firstly, there must be urgent release by ZEC of the electronic voters' roll. We need to be able to see whether all those observations by everybody were cured by the final voters' roll. And we hope that the copy that will be given corresponds directly with the hard copy of the voters' roll," he said.



MDC-T Spokesperson Douglas Mwonozora

RAU said if the voters' roll was released many allegations raised about the vote could fall away, or be confirmed, helping to have informed views on the credibility of the elections.

Reeler said: *"there must be the release of all the information related to the voting, the number of people turned away, the number of people assisted, the number of people voting by slip, et cetera. This is data which was collected during the elections."*

RAU said release of critical information related to the elections could be what bodies like the African Union (AU) and Southern African Development Community (SADC) are waiting for to make their final assessment.

Speaking at the same meeting, Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) Spokesperson and former legislator Douglas Mwonozora said the party would address its concerns about the harmonized elections through constitutional channels.

Mwonozora said his party was aware that the new constitution did not prohibit protests demonstrations and was not making it a secret to Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (Zanu-PF) which ostensibly won a two-thirds majority that they would consider taking that route.

In a message directed to AU and SADC, Mwonozora said: *"There must not be a different standard for our elections. If an election is unfair it is unfair and it is not credible.*

"The message we are sending to Africa is that a peaceful election is not free and fair one," he said, adding: "The MDC will pursue the constitution and the law. The law allows us to demonstrate."

Goodwill Masimirembwa of Zanu-PF said his party had won the polls and warned the MDC.

"We do not want inflammatory language, people pretending we are in Egypt or Tunisia," he said.

Youth of Zimbabwe for Transparency and Progress : Unmasking unethical electoral practices

The Youth of Zimbabwe for Transparency and Progress is deeply worried by massive irregularities that marred the recently held disputable harmonised elections in which the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) ostensibly emerged as the winner with a two-thirds majority according to the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC).

It is unfortunate that though the elections seemed relatively peaceful, there were worrying concerns over apparent voter intimidation, coercion, victimisation, voter migration among other tactics in areas such as Mberengwa, Rushinga, Bikita, Buhera,

Muzarabani, Centenary, Mt Darwin, Mvurwi and Mutasa Central.

In Mberengwa East, underage students were forced to vote equipped with fake registration slips. The same scenario prevailed in Bikita South where grade 7 and form 2 students were reportedly forced to vote entirely against electoral laws and conduct. In Mutasa Central, Innocent Dambudzo Benza, a Herentals boss and ZANU PF aspiring candidate, bussed in thousands of workers and students to vote for him, after successfully registering them in this constituency. It is worrying that workers and students were exposed to untold intimidation, victimisation and coercion to vote for a candidate entirely against their wish.

In Rushinga, Mt Darwin and Centenary, many youths were declared assisted voters either on unfounded grounds of being illiterate or blind if suspected to be an MDC supporter. In most parts of Mashonaland Central, the Midlands, Mashonaland West, Manicaland and Mashonaland East provinces, the notorious 'Sabhuku nevanhu vake' (meaning people had to vote in lines controlled and managed by their village heads who knew them best), were invoked. This threatened people's freedom.

It is worth noting that such cases were anticipated well in advance and were reported long before elections to JOMIC, ZEC and other players for their intervention but very little if anything was done to address the anomaly.

These reports are a perturbing development which remains a threat to democracy and the legitimacy of such a process will compromise the outcome thereby exposing Zimbabwe to continued suffering of the majority as well as further isolation of the country from the international community.

It is a flawed democracy whose effects will be grave if not urgently addressed. We urge local democratic actors, regional, continental and the international community to seriously address the Zimbabwean electoral crisis to avoid an outright and irreparable human disaster.

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