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Zim's 31 July poll scores 1 out 15 in fully complying with SADC Electoral Guidelines

1 out of 15 - that is the score for Zimbabwe's full compliance with Southern African Development Community (SADC)'s 15 electoral guidelines and principles. A Compliance Matrix with the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections to be released by the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition on the 4th of September has shown. The matrix also shows that Zimbabwe's total Non-compliance score is 8 out 15, Partial compliance: 6 out of 15, while Full compliance is the previously stated 1 out of 15.

The Matrix is a scientific assessment of the recent Zimbabwe harmonized elections carried out by a team of Political Science researchers associated with the Coalition. The objective assessment vindicates the view held by most analysts who have argued that the endorsement of the July 31 Zimbabwe election by the SADC Electoral Observer Mission (SEOM) on September 2 in Harare was an instance of lowering and deviating from the electoral standards set by the regional bloc.

"In respect of the 15 guidelines and standards we assessed, there was virtually no compliance to 8 (53.35%) and partial compliance in line with 6 (40%)," reads the report, which also notes that:

"Only 1 (6.7%) principle was fully complied with, which relates to the holding of elections at regular intervals.

"One of the most important guidelines regarding the existence of an updated and accessible voters' roll was not complied with at all."

The report will be released for public consumption on September 3, in partial response to the SADC Election Observer Mission (SEOM) whose report rubber stamped the Zimbabwe election and declared that it was "generally credible". **Below, is a table summarizing the assessment**

Head Office

18 Philips Ave
Belgravia
Harare
+263-4-704418/+263-4-798038

SA Regional Office

711, 7th Floor Khotso House
62 Marshall Street
Marshalltown
Johannesburg
+27-11-838736/+27-732120629



NONE-COMPLIANCE	PARTIAL COMPLIANCE	COMPLIANCE
• Freedom of speech; • Full participation of the citizens in political processes; • Equal opportunity of all political parties to access the state media; • Equal opportunity to exercise the right to vote and be voted for; • Independence of the Judiciary • Impartiality of the electoral institutions; • Non-discrimination in the voters' registration; • Existence of updated and accessible voters roll; and • Timeous announcement of the election date.	• Political tolerance; • Voter education; • Constitutional and legal guarantees of freedom and rights of the citizens; • Conducive environment for free, fair and peaceful elections; • Counting of the votes at polling stations.	• Regular intervals for elections as provided for by the respective National Constitutions.

Basing on its findings, the CiZC concluded that the Zimbabwe election did not comply with over half of the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections and that endorsement of the poll by SEOM represented a significant lowering of standards to accommodate a poor score at best, and at worst a brazen effort by the Observer mission at revisionism, omission and cover-ups.

SADC's final Stamp - A lowering Electoral Standards - Civics

A considerable lowering of electoral standards by the regional bloc saw Zimbabwe getting a seal of approval from the Southern African Development Community (SADC)'s election observer mission (SEOM) on September 2, 2013 following a verdict that the Zimbabwe harmonized election was 'generally credible'.

Fairness as an electoral standard apparently fell away to accommodate 'generally credible' as a yardstick for the harmonized elections that Zimbabwe held with the SEOM report ending on a congratulatory stating:

"SEOM congratulates ZEC and the people of Zimbabwe for holding a free, peaceful and generally credible harmonized elections of July 2013 in which the will of the people was expressed"

Tanzanian Foreign Minister, Bernard Membe, who was Head of Delegation of SADC Electoral Observer Mission (SEOM) representing Tanzanian President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, summed up the verdict on the Zimbabwean polls thus:

"This election was generally credible. On the question of fairness, it is difficult to say it was fair."

Addressing at a press briefing - which was attended by the outgoing Zimbabwe Foreign Minister Simbarashe Mumbengwegwi, Zimbabwe Election Commission (ZEC) Chairperson Rita Makarau, some member's civil society and the press - Membe conceded that "the credibility of the election process" has been met with negative evaluations, but maintained that the verdict on Zimbabwe took cognizance of the fact that "there were so many other elements that when put together elevated the election to a credible status" particularly when measured against the 2008 elections.

Analysts expressed concern over this emphasis on comparing and contrasting the 31 July harmonized poll to the 2008 elections saying an election should be measured against SADC standards governing elections and not measured against the elections preceding it.



Thabani Nyoni

Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC) Spokesperson Thabani Nyoni said SADC had lowered standards and the development warranted that Zimbabwe and SADC citizens unite in calling for genuine democracy

"The SADC final report on elections in Zimbabwe is a clear message to the citizens of Zimbabwe and SADC that our leaders are not interested in the full expression of the will of the people through free, fair and credible elections."

"The position of the observer team confirms that the region is sliding towards democratic regression rather than democratic progress," Nyoni said.

Tawanda Chimhini, the director of Election Resource Centre (ERC), said electoral standards in Zimbabwe had been lowered "unfortunately not by Zimbabweans but by the region itself" adding that it "is a tragedy not only for Zimbabwe", but the entire region considering that seven SADC countries are holding elections by 2014.

"The fact that the regional body has not fully explored the absence of fairness in this poll but are still prepared to accept it, suggests that standards for elections in Zimbabwe have been lowered."

"Had SADC remained faithful to the established SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing the Conduct of Democratic Elections in making their assessment of the harmonized elections, the regional body could have found it difficult to accept the July 31 2013 polls as credible, let alone being a reflection of the will of Zimbabweans," Chimhini said.

Minister Membe at the press Briefing only presented a Summary statement, saying the full report could not be made available because of logistical problems related to the inauguration of a new SADC Executive Secretary, Tanzanian woman, Stergomena Tax, on September 1, 2013. Membe promised that the secretariat would be in Zimbabwe soon with the report to distribute it to stakeholders.

A cross section of expectations on the 8th Parliament

ZIMBABWEANS from different walks of life expressed their expectations on the 8th Parliament of Zimbabwe as parliamentarians who were elected in the disputed 2013 harmonized elections went through the swearing-in formalities on Tuesday, September 3, 2013. The Parliamentarians, who are predominantly from the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front, ZANU PF which commands a two-thirds majority in both the House of Assembly and Senate, will constitute the Legislative Arm of Government for the next five years.

The effective dominance of ZANU PF in Parliament, and also the fact that the party will constitute the next Government, has got some Zimbabweans worried about the ability of Parliament to be effective in providing checks and balances on the Executive, as prescribed by the new constitution and natural dictates of separation of power and independence of the different arms of the state from each other.

The worries have in some instances been accompanied by a hope that the 8th Parliament embraces the additional independence and powers granted to it by the Constitution of Zimbabwe as passed at referendum on March 16 2013. The foregoing expectation embraces the subsidiary expectation of Parliament fully appreciating its role, embracing robust debate and asserting its autonomy and oversight functions over other arms of the state and government, instead of “rubber stamping” decisions and dictates of the Executive.

Vimbai Chandaengerwa, a 27-year-old career woman from Gweru intimated that it was difficult to be excited by and have too many expectations of the 8th Parliament:

“The 8th parliament for me comes with a lot of fear. Fear that the country has gone back to state where there is conflation between the party and the state. The dominance of ZANU PF in Parliament and the fact that they will be the effective Government may mean that the country returns to a place where parliament and other arms of government are captured institutions, at the mercy of the ZANU PF Central Committee and Politburo.

“I however hope and expect that Parliament will be more efficient in its conduct of business, especially getting the country out of the legal challenges that it faces from having a set of laws that are largely not in sync with its constitution. In the same way we viewed with disdain the emasculation of 7th Parliament by the so called “principals”, we also do not expect and will view with disdain any attempts to emasculate the House by the ZANU PF higher echelons”

Gideon Chitanga, a Zimbabwean Political Commentator, expressed his worry that the new legislators were likely to kowtow to the Executive, which was likely to be dominated by ZANU PF party heavy weights.

“The 8th Parliament has a responsibility to ensure that the executive arm of government is held accountable and that the principle of separation of powers is reinforced.

“I would prefer that parliament continues to open political space by continuing to pursue issues left outstanding from the GPA. That is, to continue with media reforms and pass legislation that fosters transparency in all institutions of governance,” Chitanga said.



Gideon Chitanga

Mary-Jane Ncube, the director of Transparency International-Zimbabwe (TIZ), said she expected 8th parliament to continue with the Bills that were left by the 7th parliament for purposes of legislative continuity as well as facilitating work in various critical areas to start. Ms Ncube also added that

“We expect that there will be less partisanship and more consensus and that parliamentarians will be more representative of their constituencies,” Ncube said.

Ncube said that the new Constitution stipulated that parliament should also seat in areas outside the capital city, Harare, adding that she expected that to happen as well as enhancing general accessibility of the legislative arm of government to all citizens.

“We expect parliament to be accessible to the public. We do not only expect to see the debates happening, but we expect to contribute to them,” she said.

Michael Mabwe, the Secretary General of the National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (NANGO), said he expected the 8th Parliament to work towards improving the lives of the general populace, emphasizing that “the people must come first not partisan interests”.

"It is our hope that there will be meaningful debates that will not end in parliament, but will be translated into tangible programs that lead to concrete development of the country in different spheres.

"We pray that there be less hackling and that parliamentarians be selfless and not engage in activities that just line their pockets whilst the ordinary citizens are wallowing in abject poverty," Mabwe said.

A social commentator working in the Midlands Province, Mzwandile Ndlovu, said despite the legitimacy issues around the 8th Parliament he expected that it would align laws to the new Constitution.

"My biggest expectation of them is to consolidate the new constitution and expedite the process of ensuring that they craft legislation that is in line with the constitution. My expectation is also that ZANU PF does not abuse its two-thirds majority to stifle debate and return the country to the dark days.

"I expect the wounded MDCs to come back strongly in the House, playing a vicious backbencher role taking the executive to task over governance issues," Ndlovu said.

Glannis Changachirere, the director of Institute for Young Women Development, said she expected the 8th Parliament to look at issues affecting the poor and women.

"We would like to express the need for the government through Parliament to ensure constitutionalism in line with the new constitution which has many guarantees for civil rights.

"We expect parliament to push for the crafting of gender-sensitive and pro-poor laws to facilitate policies that address maternal health especially in rural areas," she said.

Zivanai Muzorodzi, the programs manager of the Masvingo-based Conflict Transformation Reconciliation and Development (COTRAD), said the 7th Parliament "was characterized by looting, and marred with corruption" in terms of handling the Constituency Development Fund (CDF).

Muzorodzi said the new legislators must use the fund to develop the country.



Tawanda Moyo

Tawanda Moyo, a student at the University of Zimbabwe (UZ), said the new parliament should repeal laws such as the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act which has strict provisions which bar criticism of the President where that criticism is deemed as insult.

"I hope that the Parliament will push for more funding to tertiary institutions, protection of students on attachment, and a truly national debate on indigenization.

"Parliament should ensure that there is a strong and effective anti-corruption commission, resuscitation of industries, better labor laws and infrastructure maintenance," Moyo said.

Crisis comment on Final SADC Observer Mission Report : Exercise in revisionism, omission and cover-ups

THE SADC Electoral Observer Mission (SEOM)'s final verdict on Zimbabwe's July 31 2013 election IS revisionist, and smacks of a Cover-up. The final statement of the Observer mission as presented by Honorable Bernard Membe, shows evidence of the Observer mission having downplayed and or omitted some serious concerns around state media bias, fake voter registration slips, high numbers of assisted and turned away voters and the unavailability of the voters' roll for inspection by parties and voters as recorded in the SEOM preliminary report of August 2.

It seems clear from what has thus far been presented, that the Observer mission had since resolved to stick to its initial endorsement, as there is no evidence in their latest position of a consolidation or finer grained analysis of its own observer reports in an objective fashion. If anything, a number of the contentious issues raised in their preliminary report have since been relegated to insignificance, not even warranting a mention in the summary of the final report.

While we await the final copy of the SADC Observer Missions report, the statement by Hon. Membe, has ample evidence that SADC itself has no respect for, let alone adherence to, their own Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections. This lack of respect has the very negative impact of setting the bar very lowly, for countries in the region where the credibility of electoral processes, their freeness and fairness as well as ability to be reflective of the will of the people is concerned. This final position is an unfortunate green light to other countries in the SADC region and the continent of Africa, to lessen efforts at adherence to set standards where democratic elections are concerned.

The SEOM, which largely okayed the July 31 poll as " free, peaceful and generally reflective of the will of the people", has set the tone for credibility with qualifiers where elections in the region is concerned. What makes it worse is the fact that although several glaring irregularities were identified and noted, and although SADC could not declare the elections as having been fair - it still lent its credibility to the process through affirming it.



Long queues on election day

WE noted the acceptance by SADC of the unfairness facilitated by the conduct of the state media, but can see politics at play from the attempt by the SEOM to water this concern down through an unwarranted focus on so called “pirate radio stations” which the mission fell over itself to demand be closed. The Zimbabwean constitution and electoral law are clear on the responsibility of the state media around fair and equal coverage of political voices during elections. This is deliberate, because of the parentage of state media, which is supposed to be the people of Zimbabwe, in their different political, social and economic complexions, through their tax dollars. While we agree that all media houses and broadcasters need to be professional, the standard bearer needs to be the State owned media houses, who have a constitutional directive to do so. The reach of these different media actors, State and Private, is also different, and the damage done by partisan, unprofessional and unbalanced coverage is also different. To put them on the same pedestal as SADC did, is stretching the point, and is an attempt at misdirection and dishonesty on the Zimbabwean constitutional dictates on the matter. The recommendation for reform is however noted and welcome.

While the statement presented by Hon. Membe acknowledges the issue of the voters roll as a serious matter impacting on the fairness of the process, his attempts in plenary to diminish the importance of the voters roll and the impact it had on the credibility of the electoral process are regrettable. It would seem, that while the region is supposed to observe elections and develop not just ‘best practice’, but also the ‘next practice’, the dismissal of questions around the issue of an analyzable soft copy of the voters roll, does not auger well for this intent. The explanation given, that nowhere else has the issue of an electronic voters roll been an issue, is not sufficient to deal with this matter, and exposes either a deliberate turning of a blind eye to the Zimbabwean context or a lack of understanding on the same by Minister Membe and or the Observer mission.



Hon. B. Membe

Although the summary of the final report pointed to two irregularities – media bias and non-availability of the voters’ roll – that were mentioned in the preliminary report in August, it noticeably left out other hot issues which had an import on any final verdict by any objective observation party to the elections.

The statement references the 2008 elections as a standard and seems to insinuate that anything better than June 2008 run-Off standard will be acceptable. This comparison is misplaced, as it justifies a bad election on the strength that there has been a worse one. SADC would be best advised to understand that a relatively peaceful, fairly free and generally credible election is not the same as a peaceful, free, fair and credible election – which is the standard that SADC had set in previous statements of intent on Zimbabwe.

The qualified verdict on the elections and the insertion of adjectives to credibility by SADC, not only sets a bad precedence, but it deliberately encourages other governments to be errant in the conduct of their own elections, knowing that the bar has been set so low, that it is harder not to clear it, than to clear it.