



*Promoting Democratic
Elections in Zimbabwe*



Press Statement

Sustained Engagement Towards Electoral Reform: Conference Recommendations

29 April 2009 - Elephant Hills Hotel, Victoria Falls - Recognizing that the current transitional period presents unique opportunities to reform key electoral institutions and democratize our electoral legal framework, the time to engage and debate as a nation is now. The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) in conjunction with the Electoral Institute of Southern African (EISA) has just concluded a conference under the theme "Post Election Review and Prospects for Electoral Reform in Zimbabwe" at the Elephant Hills Hotel in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe.

As part of the process of the further democratization of the legal and political framework within which elections are held in the country, the conference provided a platform for stakeholders to review the 2008 elections and build consensus around the specific issues relating to electoral reform in Zimbabwe. These issues included , pre-election processes such as registration of voters, the voters' roll and voter education, as well as election management post election issues including conflict management and resolution. The overall aim was to discuss ways of improving and enhancing electoral democracy in Zimbabwe.

The conference was attended by a cross section of stakeholders who included government ministers, members of Parliament, members of the diplomatic community, regional election management bodies, regional and local civil society, labour and the media.

Participants therefore recommended:

- There must be zero tolerance of political violence from any source and law enforcement agencies must impartially apply the laws criminalizing violence and intimidation.
- There is need for a paradigm shift and for Zimbabwe to embrace more inclusive and participatory electoral systems. These should result in a win-win situation that minimizes the occurrence of electoral conflict and maximizes the participation of women and minority groups, such as the Proportional Representation and the Mixed Electoral Systems.
- With a view to achieving parity in decision making institutions in line with the 2008 SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, women must be empowered to participate fully in elections.

- There is need for a truly independent, non-partisan, transparent, accountable, credible and efficient election management body appointed in an open and inclusive process.
- The management of all electoral processes, specifically voter registration, custody and maintenance of the voters' roll as well as invitation and accreditation of foreign and local observers, should be done by an impartial election management body.
- The election management body should undertake a comprehensive overhaul of the voters' roll including an independent audit of the roll.
- Voter education should be a comprehensive and continuous exercise that involves the election management body, political parties and civic organizations without any unreasonable restrictions.
- Media laws should be reformed to ensure media freedom, media pluralism, diversity and access to information. There must also be unfettered and equitable access to the media by all political parties.
- There is an immediate need to transform the state media into a truly public media.
- Special voting should be conducted in a manner that ensures secrecy, integrity, inclusivity and transparency.
- The entire results management process should be transparent and should be clearly defined in the relevant legislation such as including a constitutional provision setting a deadline for the announcement of results.
- The financing of political parties should be revisited to ensure equity and openness and funds should be managed by election management body and not government.
- Electoral conflict management mechanisms should be further enhanced to make them more effective.
- There is need for professionalization of security forces and their role in elections should be confined to the maintenance of peace.
- Abuse of state resources for party political purposes should be prohibited.

The conference was mindful of the fact that constitutional, legislative and administrative reform alone does not guarantee an environment conducive for free and fair elections. There is need for political will to be exercised in order to ensure that beyond credible and acceptable elections, a culture of entrenched democratic values is consolidated in Zimbabwe. End//

FOR COMMENTS AND FURTHER DETAILS CONTACT

EISA

Tel +27 11 482 54 95

Fax +27 11 482 61 63

Email info@eisa.org.za

Web www.eisa.org.za

Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN)

Tel +263 (04) 791 443, 798 193, 791 803, 250 736

Fax +263 (4) 250 735

Email zesn@africaonline.co.zw

Web www.zesn.org.zw