

SAOM PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

Statement by the Leader of the South African Observer Mission South African, Minister of Labour Membathisi Mdladlana

2 April 2005

Background

The South African Observer Mission (SAOM) was put together by President Thabo Mbeki to observe the 2005 Parliamentary elections in the Republic of Zimbabwe. The Mission had the mandate to intervene on any activity that would undermine the possibility to have free and fair elections in Zimbabwe.

The Mission was composed of National Legislature and Provincial Legislatures of North West, Mpumalanga and Limpopo.

DEPLOYMENT OF OBSERVERS

The Mission arrived in Zimbabwe on Monday, the 14th of March 2005, two weeks before voting day in accordance with SADC Principles and Guidelines, Governing Elections in the region.

Following its arrival, the Mission received several briefings from different stakeholders involved in the process of elections in the country. The team was then deployed to these provinces:

- * Harare & Chitungwiza
- * Mashonaland East
- * Mashonaland West
- * Mashonaland Central
- * Masvingo
- * Matebeleland South
- * Bulawayo
- * Manicaland and
- * Midlands
- * Matebeleland North

The teams were based in provinces until the end of the counting process. All in all the Mission deployed more than fifty observers throughout the country, who observed numerous rallies by political parties, party canvassing sessions and voter education sessions.

CONSULTATIONS

The South African Observer Mission held consultations with several organisations in Zimbabwe with the objective to acquaint itself with the political situation in the country.

The Mission met with the electoral institutions, political parties, NGOs and other Observer Missions. The following were met:

- * Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC)
- * Electoral Supervisory Commission (ESC)
- * Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network (ZESN)
- * Zimbabwe Council of Churches
- * Zimbabwe Crisis Coalition
- * National Constitutional Assembly
- * Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (Zanu PF)
- * Movement for Democratic Change (MDC)
- * Zimbabwe Broadcasting Holdings (ZBH)
- * African Union Observer Mission

The Mission paid a courtesy call to the President of the republic of Zimbabwe, President Robert Mugabe. The Mission also met President of the MDC, Mr Morgan Tsvangirai.

INTERVENTIONS

As per the mandate of the Mission, we intervened in a number of areas, some of which include the following:

- * At an MDC rally held at the Quality International Hotel in Harare our observers intervened successfully after a number of MDC supporters were arrested by the police. Our intervention resulted in their release.
- * In Mashonaland Central the observer team met with the police after the MDC had alleged it had been refused permission to hold a meeting at the Bindura Sports ground on 27 March 2005. Again, upon the intervention of our observers the meeting went ahead as planned.
- * With regard to the alleged use of food distribution as a political tool our teams were unable to verify the truthfulness of the same, where follow-ups were made.
- * Concerning the alleged acts of intimidation and the tampering with elections posters, there is general agreement that the police did take action without fear or favour.

THE MOOD

All organisations and political Parties were unanimous in the view that, in comparison to the 2000 and 2002 elections the political environment for free elections was much improved. In this regard, Political parties were able to campaign freely everywhere in the

country without hindrance. During these elections the people of Zimbabwe and political parties in particular, demonstrated a great degree of political maturity and tolerance.

Polling day proceeded without any notable irregularities reported. The polling stations processed voters quicker without people waiting longer in the queues.

The positive inputs made by observer teams also contributed towards the creation of an even better political climate during the elections.

CONCLUSION

The Mission received reports from all provinces on daily observations. Based on these reports, the South African Observer Mission came to the following conclusion:

- * The 2005 parliamentary elections were conducted in line with the laws of the country which by and large conforms to the SADC guidelines governing elections.
- * The political climate in Zimbabwe, under which the 2005 parliamentary elections were held, was conducive for elections to take place.
- * In all provinces, parties and candidates had the political space to campaign.
- * The conduct of political parties showed much tolerance and maturity throughout the process.
- * Electoral institutions conducted elections smoothly and efficiently.

Accordingly, it is the view of the mission that the 2005 parliamentary elections in Zimbabwe **reflect the will of the people**.

The mission wishes to commend the political parties, independents and the people of Zimbabwe in general for their conduct during these elections.

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