



Zimbabwe Election Support Network

ZESN

10 Rochester Crescent, Belgravia
Harare, Zimbabwe
Tel / Fax: 250735/6
Email: zesn@africaonline.co.zw
Website: www.zesn.org.zw

P. O Box BE 630
Belvedere
Harare, Zimbabwe

25 November 2005

Press Statement

Preliminary statement for the Senate elections and Gutu North Parliamentary by-election

The Zimbabwe Election Support Network, a coalition of 35 non-governmental organisations, will be observing the Senate elections in **17 out of the 31** of the 50 contested senatorial constituencies as well the Gutu North constituency by-election. The ill timing of the election, which comes barely eight months after the March parliamentary elections, has made it difficult for adequate preparations to be made and hence ZESN will conduct limited observation of the election. ZESN will therefore deploy 42 observers who will conduct mobile observation in the designated constituencies.

Due to the prevailing economic meltdown and the political crisis in the country, the senate election is unlikely to arouse the electorate's interest and will further strain the country's ailing economy. The huge costs involved in running and managing elections as well as the salaries and other benefits that will accrue to the senators will further worsen the economic burden.

The untimely scheduling of the election has led to early closure of schools that resulted in the disruption of classes and major examinations such as the 'Ordinary' and 'Advanced' levels. ZESN gravely notes that the government has prioritised these elections ahead of critical basic rights such as health amid reports that major referral hospitals such as the Harare hospital are threatened with closure due to critical shortages in medication, equipment and human resources. Coupled with this pending crisis, the persistent shortages of fuel and basic commodities will have a negative impact, not only on the voters, but also on election observation, monitoring and general logistical support services necessary for the efficient running of elections. ZESN gravely notes that this election diverts attention from the real economic and developmental issues affecting the country.

ZESN notes that there is general lack of interest in the pending election as indicated by the widespread ignorance and lack of understanding on the role of a senate in a democracy and will most likely result in massive voter apathy.

ZESN expresses its grave concern that the government did not seriously consider all contentious issues that were raised by ZESN and other civic organisations on the state of preparedness of the nation to hold an election of such magnitude at this time. As a result, it is not surprising that the election will be characterized by an insignificant presence of both regional and international observers.

Further, ZESN is disturbed by the shambolic state of the voters' roll, the loss of entitlement to vote through the Constitutional Amendment (No 17) Act, as well as the massive urban clean up exercise, dubbed Operation Murambatsvina, which will disenfranchise thousands of voters. ZESN is also concerned that the delimitation exercise of the senatorial constituencies was not carried out in a transparent manner.

ZESN re-affirms its position that the senators should have been elected under the proportional representation system using the 2005 March Parliamentary election results. Furthermore, the network is disturbed that no attempts have been made to make provisions for the 50% political representation of women as clearly shown by the current list of candidates which is a far cry from the previous 30% quota as advocated for under the SADC protocol on participation of women.

In view of the challenges, disputes and other issues that have characterized previous elections and the issues raised by numerous stakeholders on the Constitutional Amendment (No 17) Act, ZESN reiterates its call for the overhaul of the country's electoral system and supports the call for a new and people driven constitution.

ZESN hopes that the prevailing peaceful environment shall continue to prevail during and after the elections.

Ends//