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ZEC Grilled over BVR



## CSOs Grill ZEC over BVR

By Staff Reporter

The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) is under fire from civil society organisations over the current Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) process which took off on a false start. The process kicked off on the 14th of September and is expected to end on the 15th of January 2018 according to a proclamation made by president Mugabe a week before voter registration began.

The commission, which has always been under fire from stakeholders due to its cryptic nature, indicated that it was ready to kick start the registration process with only 400 kits located at 63 registration centres countrywide while it awaits delivery of the remaining 2600 registration kits which will trigger a national registration blitz once delivered. According to reports, ZEC had not paid Laxton group by the time the president made the voter registration proclamation, a situation which did not go down well with a number of stakeholders who felt ZEC was being pushed by ZANU PF for an early election. However, indications from ZEC are that the remaining kits are expected in the country by the 30th of September 2017.

The commission is also under fire as the current registration process is marred with long queues, delays in voter registration kits, failure of some kits to detect fingerprints, delays in opening registration centres and shortages of VR1 and VR9 forms at most centres. As well as unavailability of commissioner of oath.



**ZEC Chairperson, Justice Rita Makarau**

Makarau and her team, who have a habit of not responding to requests from stakeholders are targeting to register at least 7 million potential voters by the end of the registration process and ultimately come up with a new voters roll. The commissioner, however, has not yet hinted on the

location of servers to hold data collected regardless of numerous requests made by various stakeholders. The high court also ruled out that an application made by the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) challenging ZEC over BVR process was not urgent.

Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC) through its members witnessed a number of irregularities that ZEC needs to address immediately to improve the current BVR process.

Zimbabwe's leading poll watchdog *continued On page 3...*

## YOUTHS URGED TO EXERCISE THEIR RIGHT TO VOTE

Patriotic youths who are now eligible to vote in the coming 2018 elections have been encouraged to register with the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission regardless of the numerous frustrations faced by a number of Zimbabweans at the current 63 voter registration centres.

Stakeholders who participated at a recent Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC) voter registration coordination meeting indicated that the youth are the future of Zimbabwe and therefore should take advantage of the current registration process and exercise their right.

Numerous speakers pointed out that youths are at an advantage point especially in this era of Information and

Communication Technologies (ICTs) as they can access information easily on various social media platforms such as facebook, what's app and twitter.

"Our mandate is to ensure that the youth have an understanding of the electoral processes that are currently taking place. Our key



**Young people at a recent youth gathering**

message is that youths should register to vote as the future of Zimbabwe lies in their hands.

As young people, we also form (YVP) expressed concern that the majority of the over the presidential proclamation population but unfortunately we seem to have as it limited voter registration surrendered our right to participate in elections to too early and older generations", said Claris Madhuku, CiZC Youth Committee Chairperson. He also pointed out that while civil society was making intensive efforts to ensure that the As an organisation we are right voter education in formation reaches citizens it is the duty of ZEC to be convinced to vote and as to ensure that voter education reaches everyone in Zimbabwe.

The organisation urged politicians to elevate youths to positions of authority instead of using them during elections.

## Updates from the spokesperson :- CiZC Position on the on-going Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) Process

Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC) is concerned with the apparent incapacity of the Zimbabwe electoral Commission to administer a Voter Registration exercise meant to create a new clean voters roll. We are worried by the inadequacies of the commission in ensuring a transparent voter registration process amid absence of easily accessible public information on the BVR process.

We are worried that with the current state of the BVR process Zimbabwe is unlikely to conduct a credible electoral process in 2018. In light of the immense irregularities surrounding the process we call on the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) to urgently ensure public information is accessible and the BVR process is as transparent as possible as the first step in retaining integrity and trust building with election stakeholders and citizens.

### Key emerging Issues:

We have noted with grave concern that the voter registration process in urban centres is slow with ZEC indicating that they will only register 75 people a day in Harare. This runs contrary to plans of registering 7 million voters at the end of the 6months period. In Harare on Tuesday 19 September, ZEC ran out of VR1 forms at Remembrance House, Mbare sending multitudes of citizens back home unregistered.

We are surprised at the decision by ZEC to deploy 63 voter registration units throughout the country when the commission claims to be in possession of over 400 units. We query the rationale behind the deployment of the inadequate equipment.

### We note the following issues:

- ◆ Electoral Act is still to be fully aligned with the constitution and the Voter Registration Regulations still have grey areas. In their current state the legislative and regulatory frameworks run counter to the constitution.
- ◆ ZEC hastily launched and began the voter registration process without adequate voter education.

- ◆ The Biometric Voter Registration process is being implemented without clear timelines
- ◆ Civil society organisations outside Harare have not yet received voter education materials from the Zimbabwe Election Commission

- ◆ The location of voter registration centres is not strategic and are inaccessible rendering most citizens unable to register to vote. We are worried with the decision to locate the

Umuza Voter Registration Centre in Bulawayo Central Business District while the Sanyati Voter Registration Centre is located some 90 Kilometres from Sanyati Centre in Kadoma.

- ◆ Inaccessibility of identity documents at the Registrar General's Offices country-wide, of the 52000 applicants only 34000 received identity documents, significantly disenfranchising women who constitute the bulk of the applicants.
- ◆ ZEC remains without a clear media strategy on the Biometric Voter Registration process with most citizens unaware of the process.

- ◆ ZEC has not yet produced and circulated a set of operational procedures that the public should expect in registration centres or stations and what those observing and monitoring the process would observe.
- ◆ The Commission employed people who are not conversant with the use and op-

eration ICTs hence the slow pace of registration for instance in Harare ZEC registered only 5 people from 8AM – 1130 on Wednesday 20 September 2017.

The commission has not yet set up a data centre where voters' information will be stored. We find this amiss and question where the current information being captured is being stored. This raises a lot of concern on the vulnerability of voters' information.

- ◆ ZEC has not yet circulated information on all voter registration centres with citizens left guessing on where and how they will register to voter.

- ◆ The Logistics Committee continues to be an arm in electoral administration whose personnel and appointment is shrouded in secrecy. Equally the criterion to the Commission's staffing and recruitment has remained in secrecy with neither transparency nor accountability to the citizen and election stakeholders.

### Implications on Electoral Democracy

In light of the key emerging issues and more cited above, we believe that the delays in registering voters in urban centres and communal lands are designed to disenfranchise citizens from enjoying their constitu-

tional right to a free, fair and credible election in 2018. In its current state and format ZEC will not be able to register the projected 7million voters in the new biometric voters roll.

We wish to warn ZEC that, if poorly implemented, BVR can be a monumental disaster which will continue to perpetuate the problem of state illegitimacy in Zimbabwe and create a constitutional crisis where the will of the citizens is abrogated. With its inadequacies, ZEC has set in motion a complex process of electoral fraud which will descend the country further into the abyss. We hold that a shoddy voter registration process will produce contested results and encourage apathy among citizens in participation in election related processes.

### Recommendations

We call upon ZEC to act urgently and decisively on these irregularities and ensure that Zimbabwe passes all tests for democratic elections that are competitive, periodic, inclusive, regular, transparent in which persons to hold office at all levels of government are elected, through the secret ballot, by citizens who broadly enjoy fundamental human rights and freedoms. In the absence of radical changes to the above challenges, we doubt ZEC's commitment and Zimbabwe's readiness to hold a credible, free and fair election in 2018.

ENDS//



CiZC Spokesperson Dumisani Nkomo

## ZIMRIGHTS Launches voter registration campaign

Okay Machisa  
ZimRights, National Director



The Zimbabwe Human Rights Association (ZimRights) launched a massive campaign to raise public awareness and encourage people to register to vote under the new Biometric Voter Registration process currently underway.

Launched in Gweru at Mkoba stadium recently, the campaign dubbed 10 by 10 is expected to see an increase in the number of people registering to vote in 2018. According to ZIMRIGHTS, each potential voter is encouraged to mobilise 10 other people to go and register to vote.

The strategy by ZIMRIGHTS comes at a time when the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) launched the long-anticipated mobile Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) campaign on the 15th of September 2017.

On Saturday, September 16, 2017, ZimRights col-

laborating with ZIFM stereo launched the #10x10 campaign in Gweru's Mkoba 6 suburb.

Aimed at mobilising citizens to register as voters, the launch event was boosted by open air and free performances from artists such as Ammara Brown and Nicholas Zacharia as well as dance groups, attracting over 2000 people.

In a related development, ZimRights also released a short musical jingle, urg-

ing people to register to vote.

The campaign to mobilise people to register as voters will be taken to other parts of the country.

The launch, which was graced by Midlands Provincial chairperson Martin Bongozzo, ZimRights Director Okay Machisa, and National Programs Coordinator Cynthia Manjoro will be launched in all the other 9 provinces.

## A Week in Civil Society

The Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe intention to conduct a peaceful march was cancelled by the ZRP. The demonstration was aimed at petitioning the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare as well as the Salary Services Bureau (SSB) over their salaries. In response to their 5th of September 2017 letter of notice Officer Commanding Harare Central District Chief Superintendent Jasper Chizemo wrote to PTUZ on the day of the supposed march (14 September) cancelling their demonstration citing unnamed competing activities of 'national interest.'

The Media Institute of Southern Africa is concerned with the closing of broadcasting space in Zimbabwe. The Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ) made an appeal to the High Court ruling which allowed Econet Media Limited (Mauritius) to distribute KWESE TV satellite to the Zimbabwean viewership under a broadcasting license that was issued to Dr Dish Ltd by BAZ. BAZ lawyers cited that "the High Court has no legal jurisdiction presiding over issues pertaining to the suspension or cancellation of a license as it was ousted by Section 43 (1) (e) of the Broadcasting Act". Meanwhile, Kwese TV through a partnership with NETFLIX successfully launched its services in South Africa.

The Zimbabwe Human Rights Association (ZimRights) recently conducted a BVR awareness training targeting its members from Mbare and Chitungwiza.

Students Solidarity Trust Project Officer Darlington "Cde Danso" Madzonga and the other co-accused Edmore Masvubhi and Barnabas Mwanaka who have both been incarcerated for the past 70 days while awaiting trial have finally been granted bail by High Court Judge Emmy Tsanga. The bail hearing was a chilling affair given the gravity that has been laid against the two. Cde Danso and his alleged accomplice are accused of murdering a police officer during a charge by riot police on innocent civilians after a peaceful march.

The Electoral Resource Centre will launch an election reform barometer on 26th September at Meikles Hotel from 8.00am to 10.00am.

Heal Zimbabwe Trust recorded a total of 16 cases of human rights violations from 9 districts between the 20th of August and the 15th of September 2017. HZT recorded four different categories of human rights violations that include Intimidation (with threats of violence or threats of withdrawal of food aid or agricultural inputs), forced participation (in political meetings, Financial or material contributions), arson and assault. The organisation observed that Intimidation recorded the highest number of cases in this reported period with 68.75%, followed by forced attendance to political gatherings recording 18.75% and arson which recorded 6.25% while assault which recorded 6.25%. Heal Zimbabwe observed that the recorded human rights violations are mainly centred on (i) ZANU PF restructuring exercises within local communities, (ii) the hype behind the recently announced Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) process which was rolled out in local communities beginning on the 18th of September 2017 and (iii) the ongoing countrywide Presidential youth interface rallies, the latest being in Bindura.

### ZEC Grilled over BVR

**continued from page 1.....**and member of the CiZC, the Election Resource Centre (ERC) made several observations which have a likelihood of affecting credibility of the 2018 elections if not attended to by responsible authorities.

In its survey, the ERC, noted that a number of voter registration centres opened late against the announced 0800-1645hrs as announced by ZEC soon after the presidential proclamation. Apart from that the ERC took note that it takes an average of 20 minutes to register one person contrary to the ZEC assured 4 minutes per person during various stakeholder engagements.

The ERC also witnessed potential voters being turned away for failure to produce proof of residence, which is one of the required documents for voter registration. According to ERC, the situation was made worse due to the absents of a Commissioner of Oath at most registration centres. Of those that were turned away in Harare were CiZC Chairperson Sally Dura and Acting Director Memory Kadau.

The poll watchdog sadly noted incidences where potential voters would fork out around USD10.00 to register as

they travel for more than 50 km to registration points implying that a number of potential voters will be disenfranchised as they are unable to fork bus fare for such an important process.

Another election watchdog, Zimbabwe Election

ers in planning and preparing for follow-up activities as well as holding to account the commission if it fails to deliver on certain promises. In its report, the watchdog noted that independent observers, party agents, and the media have not yet been accredited to start observing the on-going

voter registration process and all the other activities as the country builds up towards the crucial 2018 elections.

In a recent statement, the Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPPP) says, "...unscrupulous individuals are swindling cash from desperate citizens for provision of birth records necessary to get birth certificates and to get letters confirming residency to facilitate registration as voters."

Speaking at a Civil Society Meeting on Elections in Bulawayo, Mr Liberty Bhebhe, director of NYDT, expressed concern on why ZEC had set up a Voter Registration Centre for Umuza in Bulawayo, where residents from Umuza will require transport to access the registration centre. Jenni Williams also weighed in saying that the conduct of ZEC officials is shrouded in mystery as there is no publicly available information on what citizens should expect.

Support Network noted that the absents of an election roadmap, despite repeated requests to ZEC, means that stakeholders will only be responding to ZEC's actions. An election roadmap, according to ZESN helps all concerned stakeholders



CiZC Chairperson Sally Dura in blue and known activist Linda Masarira together with civil society members in Mbare before they were turned down by ZEC officials due to shortages of VR1 and VR9 forms.