



ZIMBABWE SOLIDARITY FORUM

Building and fostering a culture of people to people solidarity

Beyond Free and Fair

Will the Zimbabwe election provide a platform for deeper regional transformation?

PEACE AND REPRESSION MONITORS (PRM) REPORT

ZIMBABWE 2018 HARMONISED ELECTIONS

18th July 2018

Report prepared by the ACTION Support Centre

4 Clamart House, 12 Clamart Road, Richmond, Johannesburg, SOUTH AFRICA

www.asc.org.za



Executive Summary

There is little doubt that several factors are having a significant effect on the 2018 electoral context. These include the open political climate that allows all parties to campaign, the level of scrutiny from internal and external observer missions, and the pressure to project an image that breaks with the past and prepares the way for investment.

In many respects the 2018 election environment appears to be more free and fair than any election that has come before it. But this appearance might also still be revealed as a shallow cover up of deeper electoral concerns. The gradual heightening of tensions as the election approaches, and the multiple local incidents of intimidation and violence, create a climate that is volatile and unpredictable. These tensions appear to be coming to a head around the opposition confrontation of the ZEC. The situation is dynamic, and needs to be closely monitored.

As tensions escalate, as they inevitably will as the election approaches, a closer engagement by observers and the media, particularly with constituencies identified as potential hotspots, will be essential. The more confrontational language used at rallies, and in the engagement between the opposition MDC Alliance and the ZEC, are the early warning signs of the flames of violence that could so easily be sparked.

The state of the economy, and the challenges involved in making a daily living, remain the most important concern of most Zimbabweans. The election hardly touches on this reality, beyond the rhetoric of policy manifestoes and political slogans. While public debt and unemployment scar the macro-economic picture the daily search for cash and opportunity are the norm at micro level. People are struggling, and there is no respite on the immediate horizon. Whatever the election outcome.

The militarisation of ZEC undermines the credibility of the election not least because of the role that the military has played in the body politic of Zimbabwe since independence. An electoral commission run by the military, that includes people directly involved in endorsing the 2008 election outcome, cannot claim the impartiality and non-partisanship so essential in an election process.

The SADC Treaty, in Article 5, commits the Member States to “promote common political values, systems and other shared values which are transmitted through institutions, which are democratic, legitimate and effective”. The ZSF is concerned that Zimbabwe is in danger of violating this collective agreement, a bedrock of regional cooperation.

The Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum ZSF wishes the people of Zimbabwe well in the coming elections. The solidarity movement is cognisant of the democratic challenges that have dogged Zimbabwe in the past. The violent and disputed election of 2008 and the questions related to the integrity of the 2013 process have left Zimbabwe with a democratic deficit. Efforts to break from this tainted past must be applauded.

The ZSF urges the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), the Zimbabwe government, and all political parties to make every effort to minimise the chances of a disputed election.

We further urge all parties in Zimbabwe to remain committed to peace and demonstrate zero tolerance to violence, including all forms of violence against women. But a violence free electoral process will not go far enough. The Zimbabwean people have an opportunity in this year's election to make a clean break from the past and use the elections to confer legitimacy on the leadership that will drive the big task of rebuilding Zimbabwe.

ZEC's independence must be guaranteed by the government. The solidarity movement believes that the Zimbabwean government, the people of Zimbabwe, the SADC Organ on Politics Defence and Security Cooperation and the SADC Electoral Advisory Council have a shared responsibility to ensure that this election advances the regional democratic agenda and provides a solid platform for a political and economic renewal. Ensuring ZEC is empowered, independent and credible in the eyes of all contesting parties will go a long way in this regard.

If there is a genuine commitment to a free, fair and credible election ZEC must investigate and report back on the veracity of reports of deployment of the army in many constituencies across the country.

Furthermore the Zimbabwean government and the Presidency must unequivocally draw the lines between civilian and military functions and immediately return all military personnel to the barracks. The police and military must refrain from using the secrecy of the postal voting system to force personnel to vote for parties which may not be of their own choosing.

The legitimacy and integrity of ZEC is also dependent on the level of transparency it demonstrates around the election management process. We call on ZEC to take all the steps necessary to address these issues. ZEC must realise that the future of the country rests on their shoulders. Individual members of ZEC must serve with distinction and pride. If they cannot then they should resign. This is the time for committed Zimbabweans to stay true to the principles and values of democracy.

The Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum calls on SADC, particularly the Electoral Advisory Council, to support the people of Zimbabwe to hold a free and fair, transparent, credible and peaceful democratic election on the 30th of July 2018.

We are hopeful that the regional body, the Zimbabwean people and the international community will do all they can to ensure an uncontested election result.

The time for the renewal and recovery of Zimbabwe is surely now. This election is pivotal in determining Zimbabwe's future direction.

Introduction

The Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum (ZSF), in line with its people-to-people solidarity approach, sent a team of experienced solidarity practitioners to Zimbabwe. Between the 3rd and 12th of July 2018 a delegation of 10 people participated in a peace and repression monitoring mission. The main purpose of the mission was to carry out an assessment of the pre-electoral environment in the run up to the harmonised presidential, parliamentary and local 2018 Zimbabwe elections.

The mission spent an intense 10 days in Zimbabwe covering the length and breadth of the country. Priority was given to areas of potential conflicts, based on an assessment of the 2013 election hot spots and updated information received from our solidarity partners in Zimbabwe.

An assessment of the levels of political contestation, in and between political parties, as well as historical evidence of conflict in previous elections, allowed the monitors team to focus on a selection of areas that represent the complexity of the terrain on the ground. The mission interacted with activities directly related to the elections, including rallies, voter education seminars, political debates, civic education sessions, and direct campaign events.

More importantly the monitors interacted with Zimbabweans from all walks of life. The Peace and Repression Monitors worked through solidarity relationships that have been built over years, to listen to and capture the perceptions, hopes and fears of ordinary Zimbabweans.

In Zimbabwe the Monitors lived in communities with Zimbabweans, housed by ordinary people, and directly experiencing the daily conditions faced by people in remote rural areas across the country. The visit built on the work done by an advance team, who consolidated the relationships and connections forged by the ZSF over many years. Monitors were paired with leaders from community based organisations and solidarity practitioners, enabling them to quickly build trust and gather information easily, enabling a solid analysis of perceptions and the rapid collection of facts and contextual information.



Members of the Peace and Repression team at R.G Mugabe International Airport

The SADC region has been seized with the Zimbabwean matter for over twenty years. Following the ouster of Robert Mugabe in November of 2017 in a military operation, codenamed Operation Restore Legacy, the 2018 election is seen by many commentators as a watershed election. The first election post Mugabe, and the first election following the military intervention in November 2017.

The solidarity movement is cognisant of the democratic challenges that have dogged Zimbabwe in the past. The violent and disputed election of 2008 and the questions related to the integrity of the 2013 process have left Zimbabwe with a democratic deficit. Efforts to break from this tainted past must be applauded.

The time for the renewal and recovery of Zimbabwe is surely now. This election is pivotal in determining Zimbabwe's future direction. For this to be a genuine democratic foundation on which to build a new, shared future, the potential for a deeper peace must be weighed against the role of the military and the meaning this election has for civil political relations.

Background

This is the first election in Zimbabwe that will take place without former President Robert Mugabe in charge. With the passing on of Morgan Tsvangirai it is also the first election that the Movement for Democratic Change has contested without their founding leader at the helm. For the first time since the 2002 presidential election Zimbabwe has two new contestants challenging for power. Emmerson Mnangagwa of the ZANU-PF party and Nelson Chamisa of the MDC Alliance are also both from the Masvingo province.

It is in the interest of the SADC region and its people that the Zimbabwean election is conducted in a manner that settles the legitimacy question once and for all. A legitimate election, and an uncontested legitimate outcome, will give any new leader the mandate to focus on the daunting task of rebuilding a crippled and struggling country. A conducive electoral environment is imperative to minimising the chances of a contested outcome and in ensuring a solid platform for accountable and responsive governance.

The regional solidarity movement is determined to support the process of ensuring this solid platform, through engaging the Zimbabwean government, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), SADC and all its organs, in an effort to ensure compliance with the Zimbabwean Electoral Act and the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections.

The mission to Zimbabwe forms part of a broader regional people-to-people solidarity agenda. The ASC believes that a solidarity movement is key to ensuring the views of the people of the region are central in shaping a regional bloc that responds to the challenges and will of its citizens. In undertaking this mission the ZSF seeks to place a peoples agenda at the centre of the governance challenges facing the SADC region and the African continent. Listening to ordinary people and sharing their perspectives and perceptions is a critical part of this effort.

The report that follows tries to capture some of the essence of what the Peace and Repression monitors heard and saw. A section of recommendations is contained at the end of the report.

Political Environment

There is little doubt that the political environment within which this election will take place is markedly different and significantly more open than in previous years. This notwithstanding there are also several instances and incidents that are of concern.

An election should seek to ensure an outcome that reflects the will of the people. On the surface the Zimbabwean process appears to be intent on allowing for this expression to take place, or at the very least for the process to appear to have done so.

Political parties are able to conduct their campaigns with relatively little interference, except for a few constituencies characterised by underlying tensions between the candidates, and in some instances examples of intimidation and manipulation from external parties, including senior political figures and elements from within the military.

The ZSF mission noted the following constituencies as areas that ZEC and the Zimbabwean government especially the law enforcement agencies will need to pay close attention to: *Hurungwe East, Epworth, Gutu North, Bikita West, Tshlolotsho, Hurungwe West, Gokwe central, Magunje and Norton.*

Evidence of the tensions in these constituencies include rival political parties tearing down posters for other contestants. The number of posters torn down in most of these constituencies were higher than observed in other towns. Interestingly, and in a marked departure from previous elections, these incidents are being reported to police, and the reports are being accepted and filed. Despite this however, based on the knowledge of the ZSF, no arrests have yet been made.

The Hurungwe East constituency is of particular concern. The two main contestants are Sarah Mahoka of the National Patriotic Front and ZANU-PF MP candidate Simba Mutedza, contesting the parliamentary and council elections. NPF is also publicly campaigning for Nelson Chamisa as their presidential candidate while ZANU-PF is supporting ED Emmerson mnangagwa. As election day approaches there is a marked increase in the levels of tension.

The NPF has opened 14 cases with the police for stolen T-Shirts, disruption of meetings, physical violence and arson. In all the cases the perpetrators were cited as Simba Mutedza. The ZSF visited a house belonging to a Mr Sapren Kademukombe (District chairperson for NPF in Hurungwe East). The team observed the presence of law and order police officers on Monday the 9th of July 2018, who said they were looking for the suspect. Observing the rallies of the two parties and talking to the contestants it became clear that the constituency is on the tipping point of this violence flaring and spreading.



Posters in Rusape

There were also reports of intimidation in areas around Chimanimani West and some parts of Makoni South in Nyanga, against MDC Alliance supporters. ZANU PF supporters were going around Nyanyadzi growth point (100km East of Mutare, along the Chipinge/Masvingo road) tearing down MDC Alliance posters, beating up people and threatening war if people voted for MDC. These were mainly between the two predominant parties, MDC Alliance and ZANU PF. Posters were also being torn down and removed, with some being pasted on top of others.

In a bizarre Zimbabwean version of electoral violence, in Kariba posters for the MDC alliance were being pasted with sugar and porridge, paving the way for baboons to tear them down as they feasted on the sticky porridge.



ZSF Monitors visit Hurungwe East where tensions have been increasing over the past few weeks.



NPF MP Candidate for Hurungwe East showing her District chairman (Sapren Kademukombe)'s house burnt down by suspected ZANU-PF members

The distribution of food aid was also an emotive issue in most rural constituencies. It emerged from the monitors reports that the food intended for known beneficiaries was being distributed for campaign purposes. The rightful beneficiaries, those above the age of 65 (as stipulated by the program), were denied access to food, as it had been distributed to others during rallies. Constituencies affected included Mhondoro Ngezi, Chirumanzi-Zivagwe, Gokwe Central, Gutu North among others

The use of hate speech has been on the increase, especially that targeting women involved in the election. References to women as “hure” (street workers or prostitutes) had become common in these areas. The MDC rallies in Mutare, where the ZEC Chairperson, Priscilla Chigumba, was castigated in song as a ‘hure’ is a case in point. It is however important to stress that the mission concludes that hate speech has not been as extreme as it has been in previous elections, and appears to be gender based rather than political party focused.

Some of the reports the mission got includes the use of government vehicles for campaigning by ZANU-PF. The observer reports show that many people were concerned about the use of government resources by political parties. Political parties were recently barred by a high court order from using government properties including schools, for political rallies. The mission observed that ZANU-PF continued to use these premises.

In Hurungwe East the mission found a group of war veterans who were camping at Chivende Primary School. The war veterans were clearly campaigning for ZANU-PF. The mission has suspicions that the school is ostensibly being used as a political support base by the veterans. This has dangerous implications given the way similar bases were used to support violence in 2013 and 2008.

The recent statement attributed to Chris Mutsvangwa and Douglas Mahiya of the War Veterans Association to the effect that “they will never allow that ‘little boy’ to take over” referring to the MDC alliance presidential candidates Nelson Chamisa are unfortunate and further threaten the legitimacy of the electoral process.

The violent incident of June 27th, where a hand grenade was thrown at a ZANU-PF Rally in Bulawayo, appears not to have had a marked escalatory effect on the political climate. Calls for heightened security, and the possibility that this will be interpreted as a legitimate reason to deploy soldiers at polling stations, must be closely scrutinised.

The use of psychological violence and intimidation was evident in speeches coming mainly from ZANU-PF. The reference to the 2008 violence constantly comes up in discussions. The President of the Republic has also referenced that period in a rally without really condemning what happened but just reminding people of the period. This coupled with the talk that ‘surely the military did not roll tanks in the street of Harare in November 2017 to surrender the country to Chamisa 6 months later’ has raised a lot of speculation among citizens and cultivated a general sense of fear in constituencies directly affected by the violence of previous elections.

Economy

The Zimbabwean Economy has been deteriorating rapidly over the past few months. The country’s trade deficit for February to June 2018 reportedly increased by 34% to \$1.26 billion. The cash crisis has remained un-addressed.

The massive growth of plastic money in towns has significantly changed the lives of urban Zimbabweans, EcoCash in particular has become the primary transactional tool. This form of transaction is still mostly urban and peri-urban. In the rural areas cash is still King, and the US\$ remains the primary currency, despite and because of its scarcity. There is a reluctance to fully accept Bond Notes, and often goods are priced differently depending on how you choose to pay for them.

The mission noted challenges in using public transport to and from work, as most operators, and even private transporters, insisted on cash payment. On the 3rd and the 4th of July 2018 EcoCash was down and a lot of people including businesses were seriously affected as many people had their monies in the EcoCash facility.



Police reportedly impounded USD \$10 million in Harare on the 4th of July 2018

The election campaigns have been centred around the resuscitation of the economy. The views of who is the better candidate to fix the economy has become part of the discourse of those engaged with the election. The nature of the economy is such that unemployment is high, most of the economy is in the informal sector, mostly focused on trading, and the position of organised labour is not as influential as it has been in the past.

Meetings with the ZCTU also discussed the dominance of the neo-liberal economic agenda, apparent in the manifestoes of almost all the contesting parties. This is indicative of the convergence towards the centre of the Zimbabwean body politic, expressed most aptly in the liberal free market economic policies, the absence of a social rights agenda and the emphasis on international investment and debt restructuring.

The perceptions of most Zimbabweans, that were engaged by the mission, is that sources of income are dwindling for the majority. As witnessed in most rural areas visited it is difficult for ordinary people to get access to money, and bond notes are particularly difficult to find.

The increase in parallel currency markets, where hundreds of people are changing money, has become a common feature in Harare and Bulawayo. The length of the queues, and the uncertainty of getting even the restricted amounts that are on offer, make it virtually impractical to walk into a bank and get foreign currency. Monitors reported that now most banks give a maximum of \$20 in bond coins as their daily customer limit..

Traditional Leaders

Complaints continue to be raised against Chiefs and Head-Men who are largely viewed as appendages of the ruling ZANU-PF. This perception is entrenched by direct reports of selective food distribution, reluctance and refusal to participate in the address verification process that formed part of the registration, outright intimidation and threats of expulsion from their areas if they do not vote for ZANU-PF.

A court order prohibiting chiefs from partisan behaviour in the execution of their duties has failed to restrain traditional leaders in multiple locations across the country. In Mutoko two headman were taken to court for standing as ZANU-PF council candidates in the upcoming

elections. The case has been highlighted by civic organisations, as an indicator of a widespread practice that exposes the brazen partisan nature of the chiefs, and their role in suppressing the will of the people.

Church Leaders

Most churches have taken the role of praying for peace and the outcome of the elections. There have also been a lot ‘prophecies’ coming out of churches highlighting who the spirit says will win. Several candidates have targeted the church in their campaigning efforts. President Mnangagwa was at the Johane Marange sect canvassing for votes from hundreds of thousands who gathered at their worship shrine in Manicaland.

The fact that the MDC Alliance presidential candidate Nelson Chamisa is an ordained minister of the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe (AFM) has in a way put the church in the mix in a bigger way than before. Whether these dynamics will play a part in heightening tension among church leaders and congregates is yet to be seen. Chamisa though has avoided using churches for campaign purposes has ensured that the Church is at the centre of the political contestation.

The Zimbabwe Council of Churches ZCC has continued with its push for tolerance and fairness in the upcoming election. They have called on all parties to shun violence.

LGBTI Rights

Galz, an LGBTI organisation based in Harare, wrote to different political parties asking for a meeting to discuss issues involving the LGBTI community. ZANU-PF is the only party that responded to their request within 48 hours. They had a very fruitful meeting with ZANU-PF and this is something that had never happened in the past. ZANU-PF made it clear that they support the LGBTI community and are prepared to work closely with Galz, although it won’t be easy as Zimbabweans are conservative. There is an agreement to continue having discussions.

Since President Emmerson Mnangagwa took over, there have reportedly not been cases of intimidation against the LGBTI community. This is an interesting example of the turnaround that accompanies the rhetoric of openness that has characterised the new President. It will also require close attention and further investigation.

Media

While the state media, and particularly the ZBC, has given some coverage to the campaigns of the opposition it remains largely dominated by news of the contesting ZANU-PF. Perceptions are rampant, across all of the areas visited by the mission, that television and state radio and newspapers are largely a mouthpiece for the ruling party.

In all the coverage in the 11 days of the mission, there was very little positive coverage of the opposition public state media. The independent media has also remained biased towards the MDC Alliance, compounding the problem. Some new independent sources have also been supportive of ZANU-PF.

It is clear that there is more media space, and space to organise and campaign, more than there was in 2013, and certainly in 2008. Nevertheless it is clear that this coverage is not even handed,

and in some instances clear bias against the incoming parties has been demonstrated. The media coverage does not appear to comply with the SADC Principles and Guidelines, and requires closer attention and a deeper fact based analysis.

ZEC operations and perceptions

The mission witnessed voter education campaigns being run by ZEC, particularly in the form of road shows, in Kadoma, Gweru, Kwekwe and other towns. The campaigns were disseminating information on voting. However, it was noted that some attendees thought these were political party meeting, as seen in Kadoma where a slogan was chanted for ZANU PF. To the credit of ZEC the matter was clarified and the sloganeering halted.

It was the mission's view that ZEC was not doing much in rural areas, where they probably are most needed to assure voters of the guarantees of their freedoms of choice, and their safety and the security of their voting choice.

There is a strong general perception that the ZEC is partial and in many conversations there is evidence that it lacks credibility. These perceptions are dismissed by ZEC as cheap propaganda fuelled by the opposition. There appears to be a reluctance on the part of ZEC to go all the way in demonstrating transparency and openness, the essential ingredients required to build trust and confidence in the electoral process.



ZEC Meeting in Shamva 9 July 2018

There is however also more engagement, and a lot more scrutiny of the way that ZEC operates. The relatively easy Observer Registration process, the open access for media to most sites, and the outspoken criticism from civil society have made it more difficult for ZEC to ignore the concerns that have been raised. Dr Qhubani Moyo a commissioner with ZEC, was seen repeatedly on social media, defending ZEC's position, and debating opposition politicians on the issues being raised.

The involvement of ZEC in the Code of Conduct for political parties, and the signing of the Peace Pledge organised by the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission have also

engaged political party leaders in discussions and processes that must have some impact on the electoral climate. But this engagement has not softened relations towards ZEC.

The ineffectiveness of the Political Parties platform, where ZEC meets with political parties to iron out differences, has been blamed by many on ZEC's unwillingness to be fair on processes. Issues of transparency have dogged the relations between the opposition parties and ZEC. What was obvious to the mission was a lack of an effective mechanism to deal with the challenges emerging as the election processes unfold. There is a real concern that disputes could escalate into widespread violence in the absence of dialogue based solutions.

The printing of ballot papers, the inspection and auditing of the voters roll, and the ballot paper itself have all become highly contentious issues. Had these concerns been treated as technical processes, and made open to all party agents, much of the current tension, and the resulting suspicion, could have been dissipated. This suspicion undermines the electoral process, and threatens the integrity of the election outcome.

The mission witnessed thousands of people, led by the MDC Alliance candidate Nelson Chamisa, march from Africa Unity Square to the ZEC headquarters, to deliver a memorandum imploring ZEC to ensure a credible, and transparent electoral process. In discussions with the MDC Alliance candidate the mission was told that ZEC Chairperson Ms Chigumba has been avoiding a direct meeting with the MDC Alliance. This meeting, and a speedy resolution to the outstanding issues of concern would appear imperative.

On the other hand, the mission was assured by ZEC that all was in place to deliver a free and fair election on the 30th of July 2018.

Militarisation and policing

The quiet manner in which the military has become an accepted part of Zimbabwean society requires special attention. The events of November 2017 installed the military as the bastions of law and order, replacing the police who appear to be subservient to, and under the command of, the military, in multiple locations across the country. The militarisation of the Zimbabwean society is a key part of the daily discussions of citizens. The lines between the state and the military have become increasingly blurred.

The presence of several military personnel within the ZEC was also raised as a matter of concern. There is a worry amongst many civics, and many of the individuals with whom the mission engaged, that the military command structure is still in place, and that ultimately military personnel, even when they have publicly retired from military service, continue to report, and take orders, through the military command structure. This same concern extends to members of the Cabinet and the heads of other state institutions.

There are also growing fears, expressed by several interviewees, of deployment of military personnel in civilian clothing in communities, under the guise of the command agriculture programme introduced by government. The difference between ZANU-PF and the military can no longer be distinguished and this has compounded the sense of fear in communities experiencing electoral tensions and that have been targeted for intimidation.

The mission met with police officers from Harare Central charge office who were summoned to a hearing after refusing deployment to areas they had not registered to vote. In discussions with the office it appeared as though this deployment is part of a trend across the country.



MDC Alliance Rally, Harare, July 11th 2018

The tensions between the police and the military, linked to the events of November 2017, appear to have prompted the decision to ensure the police are unable to vote on election day. Postal votes, the alternative to voting in a registered constituency, is often supervised, and has historically been done as a block by police personnel.

The police remain an uncertain and potentially volatile factor within the election process, and beyond. There were visible signs of doubt regarding role and authority amongst many of the police that were encountered by the mission. The potential for escalated tensions between the military and sections of the police is still a tangible risk, and a cause for real concern.

Where cases of intimidation and election related violence are reported to the police, for example in Karoi, they are unclear as to whether they have a mandate to investigate allegations before the election is over. The people talked to in Karoi suggested officers who had acted against ZANU-PF had been victimised. There seems to be a developing trend of transfers to remote places for police office that would not tow the line.

Conclusion

There is little doubt that several factors are having a significant effect on the 2018 electoral context. These include the open political climate that allows all parties to campaign, the level of scrutiny from internal and external observer missions, and the pressure to project an image that breaks with the past and prepares the way for investment.

In many respects the 2018 election environment appears be more free and fair than any election that has come before it. But this appearance might also still be revealed as a shallow cover up of deeper electoral concerns. The gradual heightening of tensions as the election approaches, and the multiple local incidents of intimidation and violence, create a climate that is volatile and unpredictable. These tensions appear to be coming to a head around the opposition confrontation of the ZEC. The situation is dynamic, and needs to be closely monitored.

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The Way Forward

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We further urge all parties in Zimbabwe to remain committed to peace and demonstrate zero tolerance to violence, including all forms of violence against women. But a violence free electoral process will not go far enough.

The Zimbabwean people have an opportunity in this year’s election to make a clean break from the past and use the elections to confer legitimacy on the leadership that will drive the big task of rebuilding Zimbabwe.

ZEC’s independence must be guaranteed by the government. The solidarity movement believes that the Zimbabwean government, the people of Zimbabwe, the SADC Organ on Politics Defence and Security Cooperation and the SADC Electoral Advisory Council have a shared responsibility.

The collective shared responsibility is to ensure that this election advances the regional democratic agenda and provides a solid platform for a political and economic renewal.

Ensuring ZEC is empowered, independent and credible in the eyes of all contesting parties will go a long way in this regard.

If there is a genuine commitment to a free, fair and credible election ZEC must investigate and report back on the veracity of reports of deployment of the army in many constituencies across the country.

Furthermore the Zimbabwean government and the Presidency must unequivocally draw the lines between civilian and military functions and immediately return all military personnel to the barracks.

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ZEC must realise that the future of the country rests on their shoulders. Individual members of ZEC must serve with distinction and pride. If they cannot then they should resign.

This is the time for committed Zimbabweans to stay true to the principles and values of democracy.

The Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum calls on SADC, particularly the Electoral Advisory Council, to support the people of Zimbabwe to hold a free and fair, transparent, credible and peaceful democratic election on the 30th of July 2018.

We are hopeful that the regional body, the Zimbabwean people and the international community will do all they can to ensure an uncontested election result.

The time for the renewal and recovery of Zimbabwe is surely now.

This election is pivotal in determining Zimbabwe's future direction.

Hosted by ACTION for Conflict Transformation, based at the ACTION Support Centre in Johannesburg, the **Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum** is a network movement of progressive South African civil society organisations, that includes youth, women, labour, faith-based, human rights and student formations that are engaged in the promotion of people-to-people solidarity for sustainable development, peace, democracy and respect for human and people's rights in Zimbabwe, engaged with and supported by regional counterparts and solidarity structures in Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Tanzania, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia and Swaziland.



#4 Clamart House, 12 Clamart Road, Richmond, Johannesburg, 2092. +27114827442 info@asc.org.za www.asc.org.za