



Zambia Elections Information Centre

Zambia Elections Information Centre (ZEIC)

PRESS STATEMENT

10 AUGUST 2016

**PRESS STATEMENT BY ZEIC COUNCIL OF ELDERS ON THE EVE
OF THE 11TH AUGUST 2016 GENERAL ELECTIONS**

Lusaka: Wednesday, August 10, 2016

Zambia Elections Information Centre (ZEIC)

Zambia Elections Information Centre (ZEIC) is a multi-stakeholder platform bringing together key elections stakeholders to work together to observe and monitor processes ahead of the 2016 general elections in Zambia. Today ZEIC launches its pre-election report which provides a comprehensive view of events and activities in the run-up to the elections. In this report offered to key stakeholders and the electorate, ZEIC notes a number of key issues in the pre-election period that may be determining factors in the delivery of a free fair and credible election process on August 11 2016.

Despite their observations and some concerns, ZEIC is confident that the various stakeholders will rise to the occasion and take their responsibilities seriously to ensure that Zambia achieves a transparent and credible election which will reflect the will of the Zambian people and bestow legitimacy on the leaders who will emerge from the process.

Overall, voter registration in the 2016 election has increased by 1,593,840 new voters and there has been an addition of 6 new constituencies and 10, 818 polling stations. The elections are being conducted within the framework of an amended constitution and legal framework.

The 2016 pre-election period has by and large been marred by incidences of violence which has created political tension in most parts of the country. We submit that key stakeholders such as the Electoral Commission of Zambia and Zambia Police could have done more to manage the situation.

There remains a lot of animosity between the major political parties despite signing peace accords and commitments through prayers. This signing of peace instruments has largely been cosmetic.

There are points of concern which still require attention such as public media coverage, conduct of the Zambia Police, and the conduct of Civil Servants. Political parties should continue to engage with the electoral commission to deal with any outstanding matters before the poll day.

CREDIBILITY OF THE ELECTION PROCESS

ZEIC believes that the credibility of elections is critical in maintaining peace and political stability. When questions of credibility and dissatisfaction arise in an election process, the result is political unrest and instability. We therefore implore all stakeholders to avoid speculation as the election unfolds. A credible election is not just about voting on the day, it requires satisfactory processes such as adequate voter registration, effective voter education and the implementation of fair legislation. We urge stakeholders to take note and endeavour to implement the following:

- 1) To avoid uncertainty, release timely, officially verified information and results through online based media platforms and social media;
- 2) To avoid speculation of fraud and eruption of violence in hotspots, provide a consistent flow of verified and analysed situational information around the whole electoral process. This should not only be limited to announcement of results;

- 3) To ensure and enable timely corrective action and redress where needed, and to prevent tension, and violence, the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) should avail real time information key to the election process to the public and stakeholders. This is critical to effectively addressing challenges that may arise and to avert potential fraud.

POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

The 2016 elections are being held under the amended constitution and a new legal regime, which has introduced changes to electoral rules. Political parties are going to the elections with presidential candidates with running mates, grade 12 (or equivalent) educational qualifications and a requirement for the winning candidate to garner a minimum of 50% plus one votes among others. These developments have realigned the political dynamics on the electoral landscape in the country. The introduction of the running mate for presidential elections will most likely affect the voting patterns in the support bases of each of the parties contesting the election. This is considering the apparent regional and ethnic nature of Zambian politics and ZEIC will be observing and monitoring these dynamics closely for the benefit of the electorate.

POLITICAL PARTY CAMPAIGNS AND VIOLENCE

The political environment has changed drastically in comparison to the 2011 tripartite election as well as the 2015 Presidential by-election. Three deaths and many injuries have been reported during the 2016 campaign period. As campaigning was underway, tensions were high between political party supporters. This led to an increase in violence. Reports recorded and collected on a daily basis across various ICT based platforms established by ZEIC, indicated that escalating levels of violence may have a negative impact on the elections and reduce voter turnout. Some of the specific issues emerging were that:

- 1) Violence has been perpetuated mainly by two political parties, namely UPND and PF whose cadres seem to have had the blessing of their leadership. Evidence from the ZEIC platforms shows that at least two to three cases of violence were experienced on a daily basis between the two rival political parties in different parts of the country.
- 2) Political cadres have increasingly become unruly to the extent that they have shown no regard for law enforcement agents. Some verified reports illustrate this fact, for example, a police man was brutally beaten by two cadres from one of the political parties. This disorderly conduct by political cadres raised questions among the citizens on the ability and capacity of Zambia Police Service and law enforcers to protect innocent citizens who get caught up in political disturbances.
- 3) On many occasions, stakeholder called on the police to not act exclusively in favour of the ruling party but protect all Zambians thereby proving their effectiveness as a police service. In addition, ZEIC engaged the Zambia Police Service on several radio and television channels, but the police have not provided regular updates on what they were doing about the escalating levels of violence which has, in turn contributed to tension among the political players.
- 4) Vulgar language used by some political party officials has been cited as one of the contributing factors to violence.

- 5) The defacing and destruction of rival party campaign materials, especially by the Patriotic Front and the UPND is reported to have been prevalent. This goes against the electoral code of conduct.
- 6) ZEIC also noted that at the centre of this violence were youth whose participation may have been influenced by social economic conditions in the country due to a number of factors, one being high levels of unemployment.

RIGHT TO ASSEMBLE

The application of the Public Order Act in the pre-election phase has been characterised by abuse, unfair bias and inconsistencies. Opposition political party campaign meetings were cancelled or denied at the last minute on the pretext that the Head of State would visit the same area and that the security environment was not conducive with understaffed police. This scenario precipitated events on 8th July 2016, when UPND cadres defied the Police's late revocation of their notification and marched on to the campaign venue. The police reportedly fired teargas and live ammunition, instantly killing a UPND female supporter identified as Mapenzi Chibulo, aged 22.

CAMPAIGN FINANCING

Due to the closed nature of the campaign framework, Zambia has not been able to adequately track monies expended by political parties during elections. It is therefore not possible to benchmark the current party financing against any past expenditure. However, in this election ZEIC calculated approximations based on the cost of campaign materials, staging of campaign rallies and the administrative costs that go with organising campaign activities. It is clear that political parties invest huge sums of money in these rallies such that, by the end of July 2016, an estimated minimum of 11 million US dollars was spent. Approximate calculations reflect that the PF spent in excess of US\$6 million and the UPND spent just under US\$5 million.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION OF ZAMBIA'S PREPAREDNESS

For the 2016 elections, the Electoral Commission of Zambia undertook a delimitation exercise and created six new constituencies. This has increased the number of polling stations from 6, 456 in 2011 to 7,700 while the number of polling streams now stands at a total of 10, 818 from 9,022 in 2011. So far, the Electoral Commission seems logistically prepared for this increment. The delimitation was intended to allow for harmonising the newly created districts as well as the overlapping traditional jurisdictions.

The voter registration exercise began towards the end of 2015 and ended in the first quarter of 2016 followed by the verification process which was done both electronically and manually. There were however, complaints by opposition political parties that the issuance of National Registration Cards and subsequently voter registration was concentrated in the ruling party strongholds, however the figures on the voters roll do not support this assertion.

Opposition parties have also alleged that there has been registration of foreign voters in the border areas of Zambia. However the Commission, with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), engaged an independent consultant to audit the voters roll for a clean-up. Despite this, the

opposition FDD and UPND expressed dissatisfaction at the process particularly with regard to foreign voters.

VOTER EDUCATION

The ECZ rolled out voter education as provided for in their mandate. This was done to ensure that the electorate was well informed about the 2016 elections. While efforts were made to effectively carry out the process, apparently, the changes to the constitution and electoral laws at the last minute just before dissolution of parliament affected the preparedness of the ECZ to disseminate the new changes and information about all the five elections, particularly the national referendum. While efforts were intensified during the campaign period, indications are that more time should have been spent on voter education about the current elections and the national referendum.

BALLOT PRINTING AND VERIFICATION

The choice of the printer for the 2016 ballot papers was a contested matter. Stakeholders from the onset failed to agree on the ECZ's choice of service provider to print the ballot papers. Accusations were made by opposition parties that the company which was selected, Al Ghurair Printing and Publishing Company of Dubai would facilitate rigging of the elections in favour of the ruling party. There were also concerns that the chosen printer's financial proposal was higher than the South African company that had printed the ballots in the previous elections and yet the bid for that particular printer was turned down. Amidst the controversy, Al Ghurair Printing and Publishing Company was still awarded the contract.

During the printing process, ECZ sent representatives from all the key stakeholders to witness the process of ballot printing in Dubai. The ballot papers were printed and delivered, then verified and dispatched to various polling stations around the country.

However, after the verification process, there was some misunderstanding regarding the dispatch of some ballot papers. The ECZ disregarded the rule which provides that stakeholders are supposed to witness the dispatch of elections materials as they send off the ballot papers at a time not agreed by stakeholders. The ECZ later apologised after political parties complained about the incident.

MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE ELECTIONS

One of the most influential aspects in reporting the elections has been the impact of ownership of media institutions. In Zambia there are three major recognisable forms of ownership: Public (or State)-owned, private and community-owned/based media.

With reference to the impact of Media ownership, a MISA Zambia and Media Liaison Committee pre-election report concludes that pre-election reporting was heavily influenced by the 'ownership' patterns of media outlets. Media reports were found to favor the political preferences of the owners and controllers of media institutions. This was across the board, whether public, private, community or online-based media institutions.

The public media especially was cited to be very biased in favor of the ruling party. The MISA Zambia report notes that, in the State-owned, public media, at least 60% of explicitly positive coverage of elections stories was reserved for the governing PF and its officials. The main opposition UPND only received 47% of the coverage in the public media.

In the private print media, the Post had essentially sided with the opposition UPND while the Daily Nation sided with the ruling PF.

Bias was also reflected in the issue around the Post Newspaper shut-down over its apparent failure to meet its tax obligations. The action taken by the tax authorities on The Post raised a number of questions as it happened during the elections campaign period when there was the greatest need for multiple sources of information for the electorate.

However, the privately-owned and controlled media gave a much higher positive coverage to the UPND (almost 39.5%) in elections-related stories compared to the PF which received 29.2% positive coverage. Conversely, the PF had more negative stories (almost 33%) compared to the UPND which scored a near 27% negative score.

These findings mirror the findings prior to the start of the election campaigns on June 2, 2016. During the campaigns, media institutions are legally compelled to offer balanced coverage of contending parties, but the Electoral Code of Conduct has largely been defied by Zambian media institutions.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE MEDIA

Another important aspect that came to light is the propensity of the media to ignore the coverage of women, who make up 51% of the Zambian population. The MISA report demonstrates that 81% of media space was reserved for men leaving only 19% space for women. Worse still, only 5% of coverage was on and about women candidates.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

ZEIC notes that there are fewer female candidates (94) in comparison with the 2011 election where a total of 138 women stood. Seven of these women are contesting as independent candidates.

The break down at party level shows that the UPND has the most women candidates at 29, followed by PF – 24, FDD -18, MMD – 8; Rainbow and UNIP have four women candidates each. Only 15 of the 23 women that were in the last parliament are standing under the PF and UPND.

Factors that have constrained women's participation include corruption, complicated and costly nominations and compromised intraparty democracy. In a number of cases women who were registered to stand for political parties were dropped on the very last day and replaced with men.

In light of this ZEIC urges political parties to implement practical measures to improve women's participation within their structures.

NUMBER OF WOMEN REGISTERED VOTERS

The 2016 general elections will have a total of 6,698,372 registered voters and women constitute the majority (3,372,935) of voters compared to men (3,325,437).

ISSUES THAT AFFECTED WOMEN AS THEY CAMPAIGNED

ZEIC observed some of the issues that affected women most:

- 1) Suspension period on election campaigns: The ECZ on 9th July, 2016 imposed a 10 days suspension period on election campaigns that ended on the 18th of July, 2016. The campaigns were suspended in Namwala and Lusaka districts which reported an escalation in violence during such periods of time.
- 2) Political incidences at rallies: Violence, has been one of the issues consistently raised as a negative impact on women's active participation in political processes. The 2016 election campaign period has been marred with incidents of violence especially at political rallies. Violence against women had escalated to levels where women were being stripped naked when dressed in their preferred party regalia.

Issued by the Council of Elders of Zambia Elections Information Centre (ZEIC)

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