



Statement on the Proclamation of the 2018 Harmonised Zimbabwe Election dates

ZSF has noted the Zimbabwe presidential proclamation which sets the election nomination date as the 14th of June 2018 and the plebiscite date as the 30th of July 2018. The 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 welcomes the public statements attributed to the President of Zimbabwe Emmerson Mnangagwa that recognise the imperative of a credible, free and fair election.

We urge all parties in Zimbabwe to remain committed to peace and demonstrate zero tolerance to violence. But a violence free electoral process does 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.

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.

The militarisation of ZEC undermines the credibility of the election 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".

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.

ZEC's independence must be guaranteed by the government. We have seen in the past few days a worrying development where the ruling party seem to be speaking on behalf of ZEC. 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.

The legitimacy and integrity of ZEC is also dependent on the level of transparency it demonstrates around the election management process. The fact that two months before a crucial election is held ZEC is yet to avail a complete voters roll to the people of Zimbabwe does not build confidence in the electorate. The lack of transparency around the printing and securing of ballot papers is another contentious area. 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.

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.

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