

GLOBAL NETWORK OF DOMESTIC ELECTION MONITORS



Statement of Solidarity with ZESN over Observation of Zimbabwe's 2018 Harmonized Election

30 August 2018 - The Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors (GNDEM), a network of 251 citizen observer groups located in 89 countries, condemns attacks upon its member organization, the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN), questioning ZESN's independence and impartiality as well as the credibility of the sample based observation (SBO) methodology.

ZESN is an independent non-partisan network of citizen organizations that has been observing elections in Zimbabwe since 2000. It is a founding member of GNDEM and a signatory to “Declaration of Principles for Non-Partisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations” as well as the “Code of Conduct for Non-Partisan Citizen Observers and Monitors.”

ZESN undertook a comprehensive effort to observe the 2018 harmonized elections and issued a number of statements on the conduct of the elections. These statements highlight both improvements and shortcomings in the electoral process. For example, ZESN long-term observers reported that all parties were able to campaign across the country, but also that intimidation of voters, particularly in rural areas, continued. Similarly, computer analysis of the final voters roll showed both overall improvement over the 2013 preliminary voters roll and continued under registration in urban areas.

ZESN has come under particular criticism over the findings from its sample based observation (SBO) – also known as a parallel vote tabulation (PVT) or quick count. SBO is a proven, advanced citizen observation methodology first developed in 1986 in the Philippines by the National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL). The methodology has since been used by citizen observer groups around the world and across Africa – including Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Senegal, and Zambia. The methodology provides the most precise and timely information on the conduct of voting and counting and independently verifies the

accuracy of the official results. The SBO methodology involves deploying trained, accredited observers to a representative random sample of polling stations determined by widely accepted statistical principles to ensure the findings are valid for all polling stations (within a margin of error).

For the 2018 harmonized election, SBO observers were deployed to a representative random sample of 750 polling stations located in every corner of the country. With regards to voting and counting, accounts from SBO observers showed overall the process went well, but observer reports also revealed shortcomings related to: potential voters being turned away and not permitted to vote particularly in the capital; widespread assisted voting in a country with high levels of education; and the failure of election officials to immediately post presidential results at all polling stations.

The SBO also produced estimates for the national results for the presidential election based on official polling station results from the 750 sampled polling stations. As noted, SBO observers witnessed the entire voting and counting processes and then reported the official results as announced by the polling officials. By 12 noon on Tuesday 31 July ZESN had received and verified complete observer reports from all 750 sampled polling stations – including polling stations results. The results that have so far been announced by ZEC fall within the SBO estimated ranges. However, it is important to point out that these estimates could not definitively determine whether or not there should be a runoff for the presidential election.

While the environment in Zimbabwe is highly polarized and the results of the presidential election are contested, GNDEM stands in solidarity with ZESN and the SBO methodology. ZESN has provided independent and impartial information throughout the electoral process that has highlighted both strengths and weaknesses. Further, the SBO is a proven methodology widely employed around the world and across Africa. While the results announced by ZEC for the Zimbabwe 2018 presidential election fall within the SBO range, they also do not rule out the possibility of a runoff election.

GNDEM reminds all stakeholders that the role of citizen observers, like ZESN, is to provide independent, impartial information on the conduct of elections based on reports from trained, accredited observers (regardless of the findings), but it is citizens themselves who will determine if an election meets their expectations and will ultimately decide if an election is credible. //Ends//