



**SADC ELECTION OBSERVER MISSION  
(SEOM)**

**PRELIMINARY STATEMENT**

**Presented by**

**THE HON. JOSÉ MARCOS BARRICA**  
**Minister of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Angola**  
**And Head of the SADC Electoral Observer Mission**

**ON THE ZIMBABWE HARMONIZED ELECTIONS  
HELD ON 29 MARCH 2008**

In terms of the Treaty and the Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections, especially Item seven (7), the Government of the Republic of Zimbabwe extended an invitation to SADC to observe its 2008 Harmonized Elections for President, Senators, Members of the National Assembly and local government Councilors elections in Zimbabwe that took place on 29 March 2008.

Following this invitation, the Chairperson of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Co-operation, His Excellency Eng. José Eduardo dos Santos, President of the Republic of Angola, officially constituted the SADC Electoral Observer Mission and mandated the Executive Secretary, Dr. Tomáz Augusto Salomão, to organize its deployment.

Pursuant to this mandate, Diplomatic Missions of SADC Member States accredited to Zimbabwe assumed the role of the advance team from January 2008. After due logistical and administrative preparations, the full SADC Electoral Observer Mission was deployed to Harare from 5 March. Hon. João Bernardo de Miranda, Minister of External Relations of Angola and the SADC Executive Secretary, Dr. Tomáz Augusto Salomão, launched the SADC Electoral Observer Mission (SEOM) on 11 March 2008. The Chairperson of the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Co-operation appointed Hon. José Marcos Barrica Minister of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Angola to head the SEOM.

The framework within which these elections took place emanate from the SADC-facilitated political dialogue, lead by His Excellency Thabo Mbeki, the President of South Africa. These discussions were aimed at reaching agreement amongst different parties regarding, amongst others, the framework within which credible elections could be held.

The SADC Electoral Observer Mission consisted of 163 members from 11 of the 13 Member States namely, Angola, Botswana, DRC, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Moçambique, Namibia, South Africa, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia. The background of the members of the Mission ranged from parliamentarians of both ruling and opposition parties, members of civil society and civil servants.

The SADC Mission familiarized itself with the legal instruments governing elections in Zimbabwe. These included, inter alia, the amended Constitution of Zimbabwe, the Electoral Law, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission Act, the Code of Conduct for Chief Election Agents, Election Agents and Observers (First Schedule), and the Code of Conduct for Political Parties and

Candidates (Fourth Schedule). The SADC Mission under the leadership of the Head of the SEOM held meetings and had briefing sessions with the Chairperson Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), Civil Society Organizations, representatives of political parties and candidates, Diplomatic Missions accredited to Zimbabwe and other Observer Missions.

As part of their fieldwork, SADC observers also attended political meetings, rallies and other gatherings of citizens across the country. The teams went as far afield as the remote corners of Zimbabwe. For example, SADC Observers were found in Beitbridge, Guanda, Lupane and Tsholotsho in Matebeleland South and North; Shamva, Mazowe and Bindura in Mashonaland Central; Chipinge, Mutare and Chimanimani in Manicaland; Kadoma, Chinhoyi, Zvimba and Kariba in Mashonaland West; Marondera and Mutoko in Mashonaland East, Zaka, Gutu, Mwenezi-Chivi in Masvingo; Kwekwe, Gweru and Gokwe in Midlands; and constituencies in metropolitan provinces of Harare and Bulawayo. In these places, the observers interacted with political parties and candidates canvassing for support, ZEC officials, police officers and citizens busy with their routine occupations.

The SADC Mission also noted that the elections were held against a background characterized by a highly tense and polarized international atmosphere where some quarters of the international community remain negative and pessimistic about Zimbabwe and its chances for credible elections.

Since 2005 the Zimbabwean government agreed to comply with the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections and used it as a basis to define the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission's (ZEC) mandate for conducting these Elections. In this regard the different electoral management bodies were reorganized bringing all electoral responsibilities under one single entity.

It was comforting to note that political parties, candidates and the electorate were conversant with the electoral laws and procedures as outlined in the Electoral Act and the SADC Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections.

Through its observations and engagement with all relevant stakeholders, the SADC Electoral Observer Mission noted concerns and allegations pertaining to:

- 1) Bias on the part of both the private and public media,
- 2) Threatening pronouncements by senior officers in the security forces,
- 3) The use of public resources for party-political purposes,
- 4) The number and distribution of polling stations,
- 5) The printing and distribution of ballot papers, and
- 6) The presence of police officers in polling stations.

The SADC Mission pursued these concerns in a systematic manner by conducting further investigations and observations and at times sought clarity from the relevant authorities.

With regard to the elections and general campaigning, the Mission found that all political parties and independent candidates were free to hold rallies and meetings with their supporters without any hindrance. Supporters of different parties were wearing party regalia in shared public spaces and transport.

These elections were characterized by high levels of peace, tolerance and political vigor of by party leaders, candidates and their supporters. No violence was observed countrywide except for few incidences like the one in Bulawayo where the house of a ZANU-PF candidate was bombed. The Mission abhors the use of violence in whatever form, and appeals for the law to be upheld.

With regard to the polling process, it is the Mission's view that the elections were conducted in an open and transparent manner. The voting process was meticulously witnessed by observers and party agents. The polling stations generally opened and closed at the prescribed times and voters behaved in an orderly manner and exercised their franchise peacefully, freely and unhindered.

It must be noted that despite earlier concerns about the presence of the members of police in the polling stations, the Mission observed no interference with the voting process.

The vote counting process was conducted meticulously and lawfully under the intense scrutiny of observers, party agents and electoral officers.

In summary, during the deployment, the Mission observed:

- 1) An acceptable level of political maturity demonstrated by Zimbabweans;
- 2) A peaceful atmosphere and high levels of political tolerance in which supporters of different parties could conduct their activities;
- 3) The use of translucent ballot boxes and the presence of observers and party agents at polling stations in line with the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections, thereby ensuring that voting was a very transparent process;
- 4) That the SADC presence inspired confidence among the voters, ZEC officials and law enforcement officers;
- 5) A positive spirit of co-operation by the Zimbabwean election authorities and other institutions by providing adequate support and clarity to voters;
- 6) Statements made by political parties and their leaders urging their supporters to accept the outcome of the elections and not to resort to violence.

It is SADC's greatest hope that the spirit of co-operation and political tolerance which prevailed thus far, will continue to thrive amongst all parties and role players in the post-election phase. The greatest winner here must be the People of Zimbabwe and hence we call on all political parties to accept the election results. Any further queries and concerns should be pursued in line with the laws of the country.

In light of the above observations, the Mission wishes to highlight issues and areas of concern that will require change and improvement in future electoral processes in Zimbabwe. Some of these include, inter alia:

- 1) Prescribed and more equitable access to state media for all political parties and candidates;
- 2) More voter education and to consider allowing political parties and civil society organizations to assist with voter education;
- 3) ZEC and other authorities to communicate timeously all relevant decisions, laws and regulations governing elections to all stakeholders;
- 4) Making efforts to distinguish between the normal and ongoing government activities from deliberate electioneering campaign activities;
- 5) The need for timeous and wider publication and verification of the voters' roll by all relevant parties and stakeholders;

- 6) Ensuring that the role during elections of all law enforcement agencies are clearly and timeously outlined to all concerned;
- 7) That the electoral authorities have adequate mechanisms to deal with complaints and rumours to facilitate speedy follow-up and decision-making;
- 8) Ensuring that there is more time allocated for all political parties and stakeholders to receive and scrutinize the voters' roll;
- 9) The enactment of legislation pertaining to the electoral processes must be completed timeously and long before the elections are due.

Notwithstanding the mammoth logistical challenges these harmonized Elections brought to bear on all concerned, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) demonstrated high levels of professionalism, resilience and hard work in organizing these complex elections. For this the ZEC deserve commendation.

Therefore, in view of the above, I would like to take this opportunity to express, on behalf of His Excellency Eng. José Eduardo dos Santos, President of the Republic of Angola and Chairperson of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation, of SADC as whole and indeed, on my own behalf, congratulations to the Zimbabwean people, their political parties and independent candidates who all participated in these elections.

We thus conclude that, notwithstanding the concerns highlighted above, the elections held in Zimbabwe on 29 March 2008 for President, Senate, House of Assembly and local government, have been a peaceful and credible expression of the will of the people of Zimbabwe.

In conclusion we wish to commend the Zimbabwean people and reiterate SADC's commitment to continue supporting their efforts in deepening democracy. Let the voice of the people of Zimbabwe be heard and respected by all.

30<sup>th</sup> March 2008