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## ELECTORAL COMMISSIONS FORUM OF SADC COUNTRIES

### THE OBSERVATION STATEMENT SUBMITTED TO THE ZIMBABWE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

#### INTRODUCTION

The Electoral Commissions Forum (ECF) of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries received an invitation from the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission dated 1<sup>st</sup> February 2008 to observe the Harmonised elections held on the 29<sup>th</sup> March 2008 in Zimbabwe. In response to this invitation, the ECF duly deployed a 21 member Observer Mission.

The Mission hereby presents this statement on its observations. A full report , including recommendations will be availed at a later stage.

#### About ECF-SADC

This is an autonomous body of electoral commissions in the SADC region which cooperate and support each other on electoral matters. The Forum is governed by a constitution that seeks to promote:

- Conditions conducive to free, fair and transparent elections
- Democracy as a political system of responsible and accountable government through the electoral process.

The rationale behind the Forum observing elections in the SADC region, is to assist fellow election management bodies identify areas requiring improvement in elections administration.

#### Mission Composition

The Electoral Commissions represented in the Observer Mission were from the following countries:

Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique

Namibia, Republic of South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia

The first delegates arrived in Harare on the 18<sup>th</sup> March, 2008 and the Mission was led by Rev Felix Mokobi, a Commissioner of the Independent Electoral Commission- Botswana. Before sending an observer mission, the Forum sent a two-member mission to Harare, Zimbabwe on a pre- assessment mission to establish the context on which elections will take place and to make logistical preparations for the ECF mission.

### **Mission activities**

The Mission organised a seminar where a number of stakeholders were invited to make presentations on the following:

- (a) The state of preparedness by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission.
- (b) The role of the media during election period.
- (c) The perspective of political parties on elections.
- (d) The Zimbabwe Electoral System and
- (e) The perspective by Civic Society and Non Governmental Organisations.

The Mission also had consultative meetings with SADC, PAN-African Parliament and the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission to share notes about the context in which elections will be conducted.

### **Deployment**

The Mission set up six teams which covered six of the ten provinces in Zimbabwe, namely; Harare, Mashonaland East, Mashonaland West, Mashonaland Central, Midlands and Manicaland. All the teams managed to make pre-poll visits in their assigned provinces to familiarize themselves with the location of the polling stations and to assess the level of preparedness on the part of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission.

### **Observations**

The Mission made the following observations:-

- The run-up to the poll was peaceful with no reported incidents of violence.
- All political parties were given an opportunity to campaign freely.

- In terms of coverage, the state media almost exclusively covered the campaigns by the ruling ZANU-PF with very little coverage of opposition parties.
- Campaign adverts were fairly balanced.
- In keeping with the principles of equitable access to public media, ZBC complied by granting airtime to contesting parties to communicate their manifestos.
- The opening of polling stations procedures were adhered to.
- There were political party/ Independent agents and other local/ international observers at most polling stations visited.
- Election logistics/ materials were adequate in all polling stations.
- The lay-out within the polling stations was properly done.
- The polling staff was adequately trained.
- The closing of poll and counting procedures were adhered to.

### **Concluding Remarks**

On the basis of the fore-going statement, the Mission is of the opinion that the elections were conducted in compliance with the laws of Zimbabwe. In addition, the Mission is satisfied that the recommended principles in the Principles for Election Management, Monitoring and Observation in the SADC Region (PEMMO) were implemented. Contrary to the doubts that ZEC did not have capacity to deliver credible elections, the mission was satisfied that ZEC was indeed prepared to conduct the harmonised elections.

*Hon. Commissioner Rev F. Mokobi*  
*Mission Leader*

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**31<sup>st</sup> March 2008, Harare, Zimbabwe**