

# Malawi Electoral Support Network (MESN)

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## Interim Statement.

### **16<sup>th</sup> March 2013 Zimbabwe Constitutional Referendum.**

Malawi Electoral Support Network (MESN) is a registered network of civil society organizations working on democratic governance and elections in Malawi. It is a registered member of Council for Non-Governmental Organizations in Malawi (CONGOMA) and NGO Board. It was formed in 2003 and has successfully participated in 2004 and 2009 Parliamentary and Presidential Elections in Malawi. It has also participated in election observer missions in the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) region and beyond. MESN is comprised of non-governmental, faith-based and community-based organizations.

MESN is currently chairing and coordinating SADC Election Support Network (SADC-ESN). This is a loose network where civic organisations who actively participate in electoral issues within the SADC region come together to share experiences and for capacity building. We have a membership of fifteen organisations. As a network, observation missions have been conducted in Malawi, Zambia, Lesotho, Namibia and South Africa based on international standards such as the Declaration of Global Principles for Citizen Election Monitoring as well as SADC and African Union (AU) principles and guidelines governing the conduct of democratic elections.

The observer mission to the Zimbabwe referendum was comprised of five mobile observers drawn from Malawi, Zambia, Swaziland and Democratic Republic of Congo. The mission was deployed from 14<sup>th</sup> March 2013 to 18<sup>th</sup> March 2013. The teams were deployed in the following provinces; Harare, Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland East, Matabeleland South and Bulawayo. In total 26 polling stations were visited.

MESN would like to congratulate the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) for being able to organize such a peaceful and successful referendum within a short period of time. MESN also commends the people of Zimbabwe for participating peacefully in the referendum.

### **OBSERVATIONS**

1. Limited enthusiasm by voters to vote in the referendum leading to low voter turn-out.
2. Majority of polling stations opened on time and had adequate voting materials except for few polling stations.
3. Voting environment was peaceful and conducive for voter participation with few skirmishes in isolated areas.
4. Few local and foreign observers were seen at polling stations.
5. Facilities for the disabled especially those with visual difficulties were not available.
6. Presence of adequate security that was friendly.

7. Good gender representation among referendum staff with the majority of staff being women.
8. Thorough check and verification of identity materials for voters. As a result a number of ineligible voters were sent back.
9. Counting of votes and tallying was done according to the laid down procedures.
10. Referendum staff conducted their duties professionally during the voting and counting.
11. Satisfactory media coverage of the referendum polling.

### **Recommendations.**

- More civic education on active citizenship is needed to prepare voters for the harmonized elections expected this year.
- Civil society organisations should deploy more election observers in the coming elections.
- There is still need for more training for ZEC staff at polling station level.
- Voters requiring assistance such as the blind be taken care of in the forthcoming elections and ensure secrecy of the vote.
- Need for increased media coverage for the forthcoming harmonized elections.

### **CONCLUSION**

MESN once again congratulates ZEC and the people of Zimbabwe for a successful and peaceful constitutional referendum. Looking at the time constraints that faced the referendum preparations, MESN calls upon all players and stakeholders for Zimbabwe harmonized elections to start preparations in good time. MESN encourages the people of Zimbabwe to continue observe peace and political co-existence as the country prepares for harmonized elections expected this year.

MESN will continue to observe the tallying and tabulation of the results and will produce a final detailed report of the constitutional referendum for Zimbabwe.

**Malawi Electoral Support Network (MESN)  
Elections, Democracy and Governance**

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