



## **PRELIMINARY STATEMENT**

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### **COMESA ELECTION OBSERVER MISSION TO THE 12th AUGUST 2021 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA**

#### **Introduction**

In response to an invitation from the Government of the Republic of Zambia, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) deployed an Election Observer Mission to observe the 12<sup>th</sup> August 2021 presidential, parliamentary and local council elections.

The COMESA Observer Mission is led by Madam Hope Kivengere from Uganda and myself Ambassador Ashraf Gamal Rashed from Egypt, we are both Members of the COMESA Committee of Elders. The Mission comprised forty-two observers drawn from ten COMESA Member States namely Burundi, Egypt, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe as well as staff from COMESA Secretariat. Prior to their deployment, COMESA observers received training on 7-8 August 2021.

The Mission's assessment of the 12th August 2021 presidential, parliamentary and local council elections is based on the Zambia Constitution and other legislations governing the conduct of elections in Zambia. The assessment is also predicated on the COMESA Election Observation Guidelines and Code of Conduct of 2013, regional and international principles governing the conduct of democratic elections.

The mission deployed twenty teams of observers in all the ten provinces of Zambia namely Lusaka (seven teams), Central (three teams in Kabwe, Kapiri Mposhi and Mumbwa), Eastern (two teams in Petauke and Chipata), Southern (two teams in Monze and Livingstone) Copperbelt (one team in Ndola), North-Western (one team in Solwezi), Western (one team in Mongu), Northern (one team in Kasama), Muchinga (one team in Chinsali) and Luapula (one team in Mansa). The teams observed the electoral process including final days of the campaigns, distribution of polling materials, opening of polling

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stations, voting, closing of polling stations and counting of ballots. Furthermore, the Mission interacted with various local and international electoral stakeholders.

This statement highlights the COMESA Election Observer Mission's preliminary findings, recommendations and conclusions based on observations and interaction with the Electoral Commission of Zambia, political parties, civil society, media, police, local monitors and other international observers. As the tallying of election results is still ongoing, this statement limits itself to the pre-electoral, polling and the counting at the various polling stations. COMESA will continue to follow the post-electoral process and a more comprehensive report will be shared with the Government of the Republic of Zambia.

### **Preliminary findings General context**

The COMESA Election Observer Mission notes that the 2021 elections in Zambia were held in line with Zambia's Constitution as amended in 2016 and related electoral laws. The mission took note of the Electoral Process Act, 2021 that amended Electoral Process Act No. 35 of 2016 in order to allow all eligible persons in lawful custody to vote. The 2021 elections were the first time prisoners voted in the national elections.

### **Voter Registration**

The mission notes that in 2020 the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) conducted registration of voters and came up with a new voters' register which contains 7,023,499 voters. An inspection of the register was done from 29<sup>th</sup> March to 7<sup>th</sup> April 2021 across the country, while the voters' register was certified on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2021.

### **Election campaigns**

The mission notes that the Zambia 2021 elections were conducted under the challenge posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the measures instituted by the World Health Organisation and individual Member States across the world to mitigate the spread included the banning of public gatherings, ensuring social distancing and wearing of face masks in public places. In view of the above, the mission noted that ECZ banned political parties from holding mass rallies which could lead to the spread of COVID-19. Political parties were instead encouraged to use other means such as road shows, distribution of fliers, use of electronic media and public address systems to minimise contact.

The COMESA Mission notes that political parties adopted different campaign strategies in light of COVID-19 restrictions. The campaigns, though largely peaceful, had reported cases of violence, deaths and destruction of campaign materials. The escalation of violence compelled the ECZ on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2021 to suspend campaigns by two main political parties the PF and UPND in four districts of Lusaka, Mpulungu, Nakonde and Namwala for fourteen days. In particular, the death of two persons on the 31<sup>st</sup> of July 2021 in Kanyama constituency in Lusaka is regrettable.

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### **Civic and voter education**

The Mission noted that ECZ conducted civic and voter education through various platforms. The voter education which was done in all wards, including correctional facilities across the country was conducted from 4th June 2021 to 4th August 2021. The impact of the civic and voter education was evident from the voter turnout, the conduct of the election as well as the low numbers of rejected ballots in some of the polling stations observed.

### **Gender and Youth participation**

The Mission noted with satisfaction, the relatively high level of women and youth registration. There was also a high observed number of women and youth turnouts during the voting. In regard to participation in elective positions, a sizeable number of women presented themselves for elections. The mission noted that one out of the sixteen presidential candidates was a woman while four of the candidates had a female running mate. In addition, 21% of the candidates contested for national assembly positions whilst 12.8% of the council chairperson/mayor contestants were women.

### **Preparedness of ECZ**

The mission commends the efforts made by ECZ to plan and organise the 2021 elections despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. On conflict management and resolution, the mission notes the creation of Conflict Management Committees (CMCs) at National and District levels to resolve conflicts/electoral disputes. Further, the establishment of the Provincial Electoral Support Centres enhanced coordination and response to logistical, administrative and other potential electoral challenges.

To ensure transparency, ECZ conducted regular stakeholder engagements at National and District levels which the mission notes and commends. The mission also notes that various stakeholders were invited by ECZ to witness the printing of ballot papers.

### **Polling day observations**

The COMESA Mission observed election procedures including opening, voting, closing and counting of ballot papers at polling station level. In total, the COMESA observers covered 250 polling stations in the 10 provinces.

### **Opening of polls**

The mission observed with satisfaction the level of transparency and professionalism exhibited by the ECZ staff at various polling stations. Generally, most polling stations opened on time at 6am with the exception of a few for various reasons. The polling stations that opened late compensated for the time lost in line with stipulated regulations. The mission noted that the opening procedures were dully followed as prescribed by the electoral laws that ensured transparency.

Electoral materials were generally delivered on time the day before the election. Most polling stations visited confirmed that they had adequate materials. However, in several

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polling stations observed, polling officials complained about the shortage of ink for the stamp pads. In instances where there were shortages, arrangements were made to address the challenges with minimum disruptions to the voting processes.

## **Voting**

Massive turnout and enthusiasm characterised the voting day with voters reportedly arriving as early as 3am. Polling officials exhibited competence and high level of transparency that ensured that voting went on smoothly in a calm and orderly environment. The Mission observed that polling officials extended assistance to persons with disabilities, the elderly, expectant mothers and mothers with small children. In some polling station observed, specifically in Chipata Central constituency in Eastern province and Mumbwa in Central province, medical staff were given priority to vote in order to return to work. The mission also observed the voting by inmates at various correctional centres across the country.

The mission appreciates the efforts by the ECZ to ensure transparency of identification and verification of voters, however this lengthened the voting process and contributed to the slow pace of the voting procedure. The mission also noted polling officials recorded the National Registration Card number on the ballot stub which further slowed down the process. Overall, these caused delays and voters interviewed indicated that they had waited for several hours to cast their vote.

Despite the generally peaceful environment during the voting, the mission noted that there were isolated cases of violence. For instance, reported violence at Kyawama secondary school polling station in Solwezi.

## **Closing and Counting Procedures**

The Mission notes with satisfaction that closing procedures were adhered to as laid down by ECZ. All the voters who were in the queue by the time of closing of polls were allowed to vote. The counting proceeded with transparency in accordance to prescribed procedures in the presence and full participation of the party agents and monitors. In some polling stations the Mission noted poor lighting that slowed down the counting process.

## **Security Personnel**

The mission also noted the presence of security personnel in all the polling station visited. Security personnel conducted themselves in a professional manner without interfering with the electoral process. Their role was limited to managing the crowds and maintaining order.

## **Observers and Agents**

All polling stations visited by the COMESA observers had representatives of political parties and independent candidates, local monitors who demonstrated commitment to the process and conducted themselves in line with the electoral code of conduct.

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## **Good Practices**

The Mission observed several good practices including:

- i. The establishment of the conflict management infrastructure to deal with election-related conflict is a best practice that provides local solutions to local problems.
- ii. The establishment of the Election Support Centres at both national and provincial levels to coordinate logistical, administrative aspects and to monitor potential electoral risks or challenges.
- iii. The impressive and significant participation of women and youth in the electoral process
- iv. The self-funding of election activities and electoral processes
- v. The decision by Government to declare the election day a non-working day allowed ample time for voters to cast their votes.
- vi. The provision and use of duplicate registers by party agents ensured transparency.
- vii. The utilisation of technology including the biometric voter registration and biometric voter identification

## **Recommendations**

The Mission wishes to make the following recommendations:

- i. The need to cap the number of voters per polling station to avoid overcrowding and delays.
- ii. There is need to review procedures that slowed down the voting process to identify bottlenecks.
- iii. The need to ensure that necessary and adequate materials are provided to all polling stations, including inks, lighting, markers, envelopes, etc.
- iv. ECZ to provide more room for polling stations in highly population areas to avoid overcrowding and to hasten the process.
- v. To ensure that the voter lists are posted outside all polling stations for easier identification of polling stations.
- vi. To allow equal opportunity in public media for all candidates/ parties to engage with the public.

The COMESA Observer Mission appreciates the opportunity extended by the Republic of Zambia to observe the 2021 General Elections and is of the opinion that the voting process was conducted in a generally peaceful and transparent environment. The mission applauds the Zambian people for turning up in large numbers to exercise their right to vote and calls upon all political stakeholders to respect the democratic will of the citizens and urges calm and restraint as tallying of votes continues. The Mission further urges that in the event of any disputes in the electoral process, the parties should pursue legally established avenues to resolve them.

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Finally, the Mission will continue following the tallying and announcement of results, and wishes the People of Zambia continued peace and prosperity.

***Ambassador Ashraf Rashed***  
***Head of the COMESA Election Observation Mission to the Republic of***  
***Zambia's 2021 General Elections Lusaka,***  
***Zambia***

***14<sup>th</sup> August 2021.***

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