

**COMMON MARKET FOR EASTERN AND  
SOUTHERN AFRICA**



**Official Preliminary Statement by the COMESA Electoral Observer Mission  
on the 2008 Harmonised Elections for the Republic of Zimbabwe**

**Background**

Following the launch and deployment of an Electoral Observer Mission to the 2008 Harmonised Elections for the Republic of Zimbabwe by the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the COMESA Electoral Observer Mission would like to issue a preliminary Statement on the findings of its mission. Its findings cover the Pre-Election Period, and Polling Day.

In line with the commitment that the Republic of Zimbabwe and other COMESA Member States made under Article 6 of the COMESA Treaty to promote Democracy and the rule of law within the COMESA Region. COMESA Integration Agenda is based on the belief that the consolidation of democracy and the rule of law is the foundation for the successful attainment of regional economic and social development.

**Composition of the Mission**

As indicated in our statement at the official launch of the Mission last week, our mission is composed of eminent women and men from the following COMESA Member States:

- (a) Ethiopia,
- (b) Malawi,
- (c) Rwanda,
- (d) Sudan,
- (e) Kenya
- (f) Democratic Republic of Congo and
- (g) Zambia.

**Deployment**

The Mission was deployed in nine (9) out of the Ten (10) provinces of the country namely:

- (a) Harare
- (b) Mashonaland Central

- (c) Mashonaland West
- (d) Mashonaland East
- (e) Midlands
- (f) Masvingo
- (g) Matebeland East
- (h) Matebeland West
- (i) Manicaland

We would like to underline that while the Mission would have liked to have covered all provinces of the country, it was unable to do so due to logistical and financial constraints.

### **Methodology**

In line with the Universal Declaration of Principles of Democratic Elections the Mission discharged its mandate within the electoral legal framework of the Republic of Zimbabwe. The Mission used a random sampling, in selecting polling stations visited by observers, as well as statistical methodology for aggregation of observation of polling stations. The Observer team communicated and held team debriefings throughout the observation period to enable a compilation of this preliminary report.

### **Meetings with Stakeholders**

The observers held meetings with a cross section of political parties and candidates participating in the Electoral Process, civil society organizations, other stakeholders such as faith based organizations and cooperating partners such as, the African Union, the SADC Observer Mission, the East African Community, the Diplomatic Community Observers, particularly COMESA Member States based in Zimbabwe, and other international and national observers.

The Observers also attended regular briefings held by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) with the view to update our selves of the preparedness of the Commission to manage the harmonized elections.

### **Political Campaign**

In addition to having meetings with stakeholders and receiving briefings from Electoral Authorities, observers also attended political campaign rallies organized by different political parties and also reviewed various media and other reports.

### **General Observations on Pre Election Period**

The Mission observed that the 2008 Harmonised Elections of the Republic of Zimbabwe have been held in an environment of peace and tranquility. The Mission also noted the following concerns expressed by stakeholders:

- (i) Allegations of possible vote rigging;
- (ii) Unequal allocation of airtime to political parties and candidates in the public media during the run-up to the elections;
- (iii) Allegations of use of public funds and machinery for campaigns by the ruling party.

Having noted the aforementioned conditions; some of which have not yet been verified by the Mission, the Mission evaluated the alleged irregularities within the national legal framework and noted the following:

- (a) the Zimbabwe electoral legal framework provides for redress of electoral grievances such as irregularities identified by all political parties, the civil society and all stakeholders;
- (b) The criminal justice system in the country through the "Electoral Courts " are mandated to address those issues that go beyond the realm and mandate of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission .

## **Evaluation of the Polling Day**

### **Voter Turnout**

Voter turnout in the country was lower than expected and in some cases it was below 50% of the registered voters.

### **Voting Process**

#### **(a) Observation of the Opening of Polling Stations**

The Mission observed that most polling stations opened on time, as the pre-sealing of ballot boxes started earlier at 6:30 pm.

The Mission further observed that correct procedures on the opening of the polling stations were strictly adhered to.

#### **(b) Observation of Polling Operations**

With regard to polling operations, the Mission noted the following:

- (i) Polling stations allowed easy access to voters, observers and monitors/party agents and, guaranteed secrecy of the vote.
- (ii) The Mission did not witness or observe any form of intimidation of voters inside or outside the polling stations;
- (iii) Law and order were observed in all polling centers visited. Therefore, the presence of security personnel was limited to keeping of law and order without interfering in the polling process;
- (iv) Voting procedures such as checks on voters national identity cards, and or the voter's registration slips were used for verification of voters in the voters rolls and the application of indelible ink on voters finger was strictly adhered to;
- (v) Where voter identification problems occurred, electoral officials recorded and handled such cases in a manner that ensured that voters with valid documentation were accorded the right to vote even if their names did not appear in the voters' roll;
- (vi) The Mission observed the large numbers of voters who were being turned away due to missing names on the voters' roll, or were "Aliens" hence were not allowed to vote or were re-directed to go to the correct voting station. The Mission was however, concerned that some of these voters might have not gone to find the right voting stations later to vote;

- (vii) Agents of political parties and candidates were allowed to witness the process;
- (viii) Except in very few cases, most voters had good understanding of voting procedures and those who needed assistance were assisted in a courteous manner by polling staff and security personnel being used as witnesses to the assistance.

### **Observation of Closing and Counting Operations**

The mission also observed closing and counting operations at a number of polling stations and noted the following among other issues:

- (a) Electoral Officials had good knowledge of rules of procedure on counting and closing operations and adhered to the law meticulously.
- (b) Party and candidate's agents and observers were allowed to monitor and observe the closing, counting and result data entry procedures. The party agents or candidates were later invited to sign off the result form as a sign of agreement of the results ascertained;

### **Capacity of Polling Staff**

The Mission observed that overall; polling station staff displayed sufficient knowledge of the electoral procedures and handled complex situations in a professional manner.

### **Participation of Women**

The Mission noted that women as electoral officials were adequately represented and in certain polling stations they had a presence of up to about 90%.

### **Overall Assessment**

Before the Mission makes its preliminary assessment of the Electoral Process, the mission would like to underscore the following:

- (a) the objective of the observation was not to observe "perfection" or a model process;
- (b) the objective of our mission was not to pass judgment on the electoral process or validate the electoral process as a whole;
- (c) genuine democratic elections are an expression of sovereignty, which in this case belongs to the people of Zimbabwe, whose free expression of will provides the authority and legitimacy of government;

Looking at the country as a whole and taking into consideration the foregoing the Mission has come to the conclusion that the 2008 Harmonised Elections for the Republic of Zimbabwe took place, in an environment of peace, and tranquility. The mission did not witness any occurrences that compromised the integrity of the votes cast. In short, the process took place in an environment, which was transparent and secure enough to guarantee the freedom of the vote and respect the will of the voters.

We would however wish to emphasise that this assessment doesn't include the post election activities, which we are still observing and following-up.

## **Conclusion**

The COMESA Electoral Observer Mission is aware that the electoral process is still going on and would like to call upon the people of Zimbabwe to maintain peace and security as the tabulation of results goes on. The Mission further calls on all aggrieved parties with the electoral process to address their grievances through appropriate legal channels that have been created to service electoral disputes in a peaceful manner. Knowing that democracy is a process and not an event, the Mission would also like to call on the peoples of the Republic of Zimbabwe, the COMESA Region and cooperating partners to continue working together to consolidate the democratic system of governance that the Republic of Zimbabwe is committed to under its own constitution as well as the COMESA Treaty and other regional and international instruments.

Lastly, the Mission would like to congratulate the people of Zimbabwe for turning up to express their will, and the ZEC for the able manner in which they handled the mammoth national task of organizing "4" elections in one. The Mission also wishes to express its profound gratitude to the people of Zimbabwe for the warm hospitality that is being accorded to the Mission as it continues observing the process until the announcement of the final results. The Mission shall prepare a detailed report of its observations which shall be submitted to the people of Zimbabwe through the ZEC.

Finally, the Mission would also like to express its appreciation to all COMESA Member States for showing solidarity with the people of the Republic of Zimbabwe in reaffirming their commitment to democratic system of governance. Special tribute is paid to the Embassies of Kenya, Zambia, The Democratic Republic of Congo, The Sudan and Ethiopia who facilitated the COMESA Mission in Zimbabwe and especially all the Member States who attached their officials to the Mission.

I Thank You!

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