



PRESENTATION BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE ZIMBABWE ELECTORAL COMMISSION, HONOURABLE JUSTICE P.M CHIGUMBA, TO DIPLOMATS: 20 OCTOBER 2021

1.0 Introduction

Let me welcome you all your Excellences to this briefing session. I believe this is our second meeting this year following the meeting held with yourselves earlier this year on the 4th of June 2021. We are drawing close to yet another election year and the discourse on elections becomes not only pertinent but increasingly important as the installation of a legitimate government is the backbone of all other political, social and economic activities in any given state.

Before we embark on that all important exercise we are faced with the imminent task of delimiting electoral boundaries as per the dictates of the law. In light of that, I will in this brief, give an update on our preparations for the delimitation of electoral boundaries and in the same vein I will also talk about voter registration which, as you are aware, is a necessary process in delimiting electoral boundaries. I will then address the issue of stakeholder engagement and hopefully dispel the perceptions out there about the Commission's "selective" engagement with political stakeholders.

2.0 Delimitation Preparations

The Commission is preparing for the delimitation of electoral boundaries principally consisting of National Assembly Constituencies and Local Authority Wards, after the 2022 population census. However delimitation is informed by the number of Registered Voters. Consequently Voter registration and its antecedent activities matter. To that end the Commission has come up with a COVID 19 Policy on Electoral Activities which will inform the Continuous as well as the planned Voter registration blitz which will be conducted in December 2021.

2.1 Update on Voter Registration Activities

2.1.1 Gazetting of Deceased Voters

In compliance with legislative provisions, the Commission will this month Gazette the first batch of Deceased voters who have been removed from the Voters Roll. These names are received from the Registrar General (RG) and are composed of people who would have been issued with death certificates as is required by the law. The first batch comprises of **22 657** records consisting of deceased records received from the RG for the period **01 September 2017 to 26 September 2019**. Thereafter, the deceased names from 27 September 2019 to 30 September 2020 and 01 October 2020 to 30 September 2021 will be gazetted separately.

2.1.2 Decentralisation of VR Activities

The Commission has decentralised some of the Voter registration activities such as transfer processing, adjudication of duplicates and general data cleaning. This will empower the Districts and the Provinces to work on records from the areas they are knowledgeable of and hence improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the data cleaning process.

2.1.3 Mobile Voter Registration Exercise

To address under registration in certain areas as well as afford those coming of age a chance to register as new voters, the Commission has planned for a Mobile Voter Registration Exercise in all constituencies in the country. The exercise will also allow registrants to update their information so that we update the voters' roll, making it comprehensive and current before commencement of the delimitation exercise.

The voter registration drive will be conducted as outlined below:

- ❑ Registration will continue at **73** static registration centres that is at District and Provincial Offices
- ❑ About **900** BVR kits will be deployed **40** at Provincial Offices and **860** in districts.
- ❑ One **(1)** Mobile Voter Registration Team, comprising of **3** BVR Kits and **4** officers, will be deployed per constituency.
- ❑ Registration will be in **two** Phases, **phase 1** starting on **6 December 2021** will run for **15** days, **phase 2** starting on 28 December will run for **35** days.
- ❑ The Commission will draw up and publicise constituency based itineraries and inform the public of dates and times they will be registering people at particular places /centres.
- ❑ Observers will be accredited starting **28 November 2021** to enable them to observe the mobile registration exercise.
- ❑ Statistics will be collated daily at all ZEC offices and updates will be broadcast on different media platforms.

2.1.4 Polling Area Update

The Commission will embark on the polling area update on **1 November 2021**. This process will ensure standardisation of the number of voters in all polling stations to be within the prescribed average of 1000 voters.

- ❑ This will also address the challenge of composite polling stations i.e. several polling stations at one location.
- ❑ Further, it will afford the Commission the chance to update its address data base and take into account new residential and infrastructure developments, as well as land use changes which affect voter population dynamics and enable the Commission to assign voters to nearest polling stations.

2.2 Activation of the Delimitation Task Force

Delimitation requires compliance to several statutory guidelines. Further, it has significant financial outlays, and is heavy on material resources. To facilitate smooth conduct of the exercise, there will be need for support from and collaboration with other Government Ministries Departments and Agencies (MDAs). To that end ZEC has activated a Delimitation Task Team and some institutional members such as Zimbabwe National Statistical Agency (ZimStat) are already collaborating with ZEC, while others are being roped in as and when they are required.

2.2.2 On-going Delimitation activities

The following activities alluded to in the last briefing session remain work in progress. These include:

- Enumeration Area (EA)to Polling Area (PA) Alignment
- Polling areas updating and standardisation
- Material development
- Capacity building for ZEC staff and stakeholders
- Stake holder engagement

3.0 Stakeholder Engagements

Stakeholder engagement remains a crucial component of the electoral process as it gives the Commission an opportunity to update the stakeholders on its activities as well as to hear their concerns and indeed get insights on ways to make the whole electoral process better. Let me assure you, Your Excellences ,that ZEC is committed to engage all its stakeholders as this is a terrain that we cannot traverse alone.

As some of you may recall, during a conference to review the 2018 Harmonised elections, the Commission was urged to have more stakeholder engagements throughout the electoral cycle. As part of our efforts to address this particular concern, the Commission decided to engage its stratified stakeholders separately and in batches taking into consideration the need to observe Covid-19 protocols.

The Commission commenced the engagements by engaging Civil Society Organisations, independent Chapter 12 Commissions, the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs and the media between May and June this year. These engagements were at national level. Their main thrust was to brief stakeholders on the resumption of some electoral activities such as voter registration, voter education, pre-delimitation activities and other electoral activities which had been interrupted by Covid-19 regulations.

Decentralised Engagements

With the 7th September 2021 relaxation of lockdown measures to level 2 the Commission has seized the opportunity to continue with the same engagements at Provincial level with the same objective of sensitising stakeholders on current electoral activities.

The idea of decentralising these engagements is to allow greater participation and enhance extensive propagation of information.

The Commission intended to invite political parties last owing to the large numbers involved, which can create a logistical nightmare in this Covid-19 environment. Currently, there are 174 political parties on the Commission's data base hence it is difficult to invite some and leave out others without creating some furore.

The recent experimental selection criterion employed by the ZEC Harare province, which sought to engage political parties in batches, selected in alphabetical order in a bid to observe Covid-19 protocols, raised some anxiety among some political parties. Let me put it on record that no political party has been barred from attending the engagement meetings. However, due to the fact that level 2 lockdown measures are still in place and the need to be in compliance with COVID -19 protocols during meetings the Commission has taken the position that it will only invite a limited number of stakeholders at any given time on a rotational basis each month. It is the Commission's intention to interact with ALL its stakeholders in an impartial manner and the Commission will ensure that all stakeholders get an opportunity to sit with us at a roundtable with the sole purpose of sharing information and discussing topical electoral issues.

The Commission will also explore other means of engaging the political parties at once, especially in Harare province where most of the 174 political parties are represented.

So far, the decentralisation of stakeholder meetings has been successful in 9 of the country's 10 provinces where different types of stakeholders have been engaged. Each province will hold at least one engagement every month.

Provincial Stakeholder Engagements Schedule

PROVINCE	OCTOBER 2021 DATES	NOVEMBER 2021 DATES
Mashonaland West	28	26
Mashonaland East	28	26
Masvingo	28	26
Matabeleland South	28	26
Matabeleland North	18	25
Midlands	22	26

Mashonaland Central	22	26
Harare	22	26
Bulawayo	29	25
Manicaland	29	26

4.0 By-elections

It would be remiss of me, Your Excellences, to conclude this briefing without providing a brief on the conduct of by-elections. Currently there are:

- ❑ 28 vacancies among the elective seats of the National Assembly;
- ❑ 105 vacancies in local authorities
- ❑ 1 vacancy in the Senate for the Senator representing Persons with disabilities
- ❑ 1 vacant seat among the Proportional Representation Seats of the National Assembly (the process of filling this vacancy has commenced as it does not involve face to face interaction)

As you are aware, Your Excellences, in terms of S.I. 225A of 2020, issued by the Minister of Health and Child Care, the conduct of by-elections is currently suspended for the duration of the period of the declaration of Covid-19 as a formidable epidemic disease. By-elections can only be held once the said suspension has been lifted.

The Commission, however, continues to receive calls by various stakeholders for it to conduct by-elections with some sectors mistakenly believing that ZEC is the obstacle towards the holding of these by-elections. There can be nothing further from the truth. The Commission stands ready to conduct by-elections once the Statutory Instrument issued by the Minister of Health and Child Welfare suspending the conduct of by-elections is amended to allow for the resumption of by-elections.

The Commission is alive to its constitutionally entrenched obligations which are, among others, to support and entrench human rights and democracy. Therefore, in view of the recent relaxation of lockdown measures to level 2, the Commission has taken measures to engage the Minister on the possibility of lifting the suspension on the conduct of by-elections. In anticipation of a lifting of the suspension, the Commission has put in place necessary administrative measures and also taken steps to learn from the experiences of others on how elections can be conducted in the midst of the pandemic. South Africa is scheduled to hold municipal elections on the 1st of November 2021 and a team of three ZEC officials has been nominated to constitute part of the Electoral Commissions Forum (ECF-SADC) Observer Mission. We anticipate that these officials will provide invaluable insights on their return.

5.0 Conclusion

The above constitutes the work that the commission is seized with in the areas of Delimitation, Voter Registration and Stakeholder Engagements. Clearly, we have our work cut out for us, but we are optimistic that we can deliver, especially with support from all our stakeholders. Nation building

is not only for ZEC but for us all. It requires all of us to put our heads together and to be responsible in all we do.

As I conclude, Your Excellencies, allow me to reiterate that as ZEC we are most grateful for such an opportunity to engage with you as it gives us an opportunity to clarify certain issues. In turn we hope that, having heard us, your own discussions on ZEC, being discussions from an informed position, will amplify our own voices in ZEC when we speak about the electoral processes in Zimbabwe and the work that we are engaged in on the ground.

THANK YOU.