

## ZIMBABWE GENDER COMMISSION (ZGC) PRELIMINARY ELECTION MONITORING REPORT ON THE 2018 HARMONISED ELECTIONS

*[Published in The Saturday Herald 11 August 2018]*

### INTRODUCTION

The Zimbabwe Gender Commission (ZGC) is one of the five Independent Commissions established in terms of Section 232 and 245 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act of 2013 and operationalised through the Zimbabwe Gender Commission Act [Chapter 10:31]. The ZGC has a critical role to play in supporting gender equality in electoral processes, using its mandate to support the implementation of gender provisions in the Constitution. Key provisions include Section 17 which provides that the State must promote gender balance to ensure that women fully participate in all the various spheres of Zimbabwean society. To this effect, the ZGC carried out a pre-election assessment from 2 – 6 July 2018 followed by the monitoring of the election from 27 July to 2 August 2018 in all the 10 Provinces. The overall objective was to carry out a gender analysis of the electoral processes.

### MONITORING FINDINGS

Whilst the ZGC applauds the comparatively peaceful environment during the elections we noted with concern the following gender issues.

- Lack of legislation to compel political parties to comply with constitutional provisions and ensure implementation of the parity principle in drawing up party lists which creates a gap for promotion of equal access to leadership and decision making by women.
- Although women constituted the majority of voters, their participation as candidates was limited as evidenced by the low number of women who succeeded in the primary elections of different political parties (15% at National Assembly and 17% at local Government). In the actual election the results show that only 12.4% women were elected outside the women's quota for National Assembly.
- The conscious targeting of women as voters, candidates and election officials in hate speech, inflammatory language and cyber bullying was prevalent.
- Although there was an increase in female presidential candidates, we noted that there were subjected to unfair media and public scrutiny compared to the males. They however are in the top four despite a wide gap from the two contenders
- Specific to the polling personnel, we noted that while women were the majority in terms of numbers, more men occupied decision making positions across all levels e.g.

Constituency Elections Officers and Presiding Officers within the election management system while women occupied mostly administrative and support functions. Similarly, there were fewer women police officers as security details compared to men. The hierarchy we understand is determined by in-post positions in government institutions.

- The majority of the assisted voters were women, some of whom were said to be illiterate or could not see properly which at face value may need further interrogation.
- Mostly poor sanitation and other facilities round polling stations which did not take into account specific needs of women polling personnel over the week they were in camp.
- Unfavourable accommodation provisions for polling officers and security personnel where males and females shared facilities including in some tent.
- Limited accessibility at some polling stations for the elderly and persons with disabilities some of whom walked for at least four kilometres.

The Zimbabwe Gender Commission however commends the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) for the following:

- Gender sensitive voter education materials in national languages;
- Separate queues for men and women which is in line with Sections 51 and 52 of the Constitution on personal security and bodily integrity;
- Preferential treatment for groups such pregnant women, nursing mothers, older persons and persons with disabilities.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- To consider implementation of the parity principle in the appointment of the next Cabinet and other Senior Government positions in line with Sections 17, 56 and 80 of the Constitution.
- Enactment of legislation to compel political parties to ensure equal representation of men and women in politics.
- Political parties should observe the gender parity principle as enshrined in the Constitution by mainstreaming gender in their party Constitutions, policies and structures.
- All political parties, supporters and the public should desist from gender based violence inflicted through hate speech, inflammatory language and cyber bullying.
- In future elections, ZEC should improve on infrastructure set up and provisions at polling stations to take into consideration gender differences and basic needs.
- ZEC should also review its approach to recruitment of short term election staff through existing institutions and take measures to ensure gender balance across all levels.
- All stakeholders should collaborate to explore and adopt measures to increase participation of women as candidates in leadership and decision making positions through appointment at other levels.

- We also urge all Zimbabweans, individually and collectively to opt for non-violent means of resolving conflict and avoid loss of life.