



ZIMBABWE HUMAN RIGHTS DAILY HARMONISED ELECTION MONITORING REPORT 15 August 2023 - Day 2

1.0 Introduction

This edition covers Day 2 of the Forum's daily harmonised election monitoring and documentation exercise.

2.0 Methodology

Information contained in this report is derived from verified media reports, information from members of the Forum and civil society reports.

3.0 Highlights of the Week

- Reports emerge of police officers being forced to vote for ZANU-PF via postal ballot
- ZRP justify the use of teargas to disperse opposition political party supporters at a rally
- High Court set to sit and address the urgency of application by CCC to compel ZEC to avail final voter's roll

4.0 Emerging Issues

4.1 Police justify the use of tear gas to disrupt opposition rally

The Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) has justified the use of tear gas to disperse opposition political party, Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) supporters during a rally in Masvingo on 13 August 2023. In an official statement issued by Assistant Commissioner Paul Nyathi, ZRP indicated that CCC deviated from their initially notified rally times. The Regulating Authority had sanctioned the CCC rally for 10.00 am to 4.00 pm but it had delayed and only started at 4.45 pm due to the late arrival of the CCC leader. The statement added that after an hour, the Police engaged CCC's National Organizing Secretary Amos Chibaya and his team who acknowledged and openly apologized for their noncompliance with the rally notification times and agreed to dismiss the crowd due to safety and security concerns over night rallies. According to the statement, it was at that point that the crowd suddenly became rowdy and started throwing stones at the police officers whilst threatening to set two police vehicles on fire. The statement alleges that one police officer sustained injuries as a result of the stones attack and that therefore the police had no option but to use tear smoke to disperse the violent crowd. The statement also gave reassurance that no one was injured by the use of teargas by the police. Furthermore, the statement concluded with a plea to political parties and their leaders to strictly adhere to the time frames specified in their rally notifications to assist in the effective maintenance of law and order in the country.

4.2 Concerns around unequal media coverage of political parties

Information, Publicity, and Broadcasting Services deputy minister Kindness Paradza said that CCC would not get equal coverage with President Emmerson Mnangagwa from State-controlled media because the latter is the Head of State. Speaking during a workshop on elections and the media in Bulawayo, Paradza indicated that CCC should wait until it takes over power to enjoy unfettered public state media coverage.

Paradza also went on further to say that since it is election season, charges for outside broadcasting (that is not live broadcasting) had been reduced but that public broadcasters had denied CCC airtime because opposition party leaders instigate hate speech. His sentiments were echoed by Information Ministry director for media services George Chisoko who said,

“The question here is about Mnangagwa being a president of ZANU-PF doing ZANU-PF work and being the Head of government...there is no way we can ignore that he is doing government business and, therefore, he will be covered.”

The state-owned television channel, ZBC TV has been providing live coverage for Mnangagwa’s campaign rallies whilst Chamisa has been denied the same opportunity. Section 155 of the Constitution stipulates that State media must provide all political parties and candidates contesting an election with fair and equal access to electronic and print media. The Forum in its 22 July to 28 July 2023 Weekly Harmonized Election Monitoring Report reported on how CCC national spokesperson, Fadzayi Mahere, bemoaned state media reporting which she defined as “unconstitutional” and “biased” in favour of the current administration. ZBC in response issued a statement on 26 July 2023 in which it indicated that it under section 61 (4) of the Zimbabwe 2013 Constitution, had editorial independence to determine what to publish and how to publish regardless of it being election season.

4.3 Concerns raised over possible rigging within the police force via postal voting

On 15 August 2023, it was made public that ZEC had “secretly” allowed police officers to vote ahead of August 23 in the absence of political parties’ polling agents. This was confirmed by ZEC deputy chairperson Rodney Simukai Kiwa who said that they had only allowed police officers deployed outside their constituencies to participate in the postal ballot system. In fact, ZEC started sending out postal ballots on 13 and 14 August 2023. He also went on further to add that there is no way postal voting could be monitored. This development came in the wake of ZEC recently gazetted Statutory Instrument 140, on 3 August 2023 which amended section 75(1)(d) of the Electoral Act. The amendment seeks to allow the chief elections officer to receive postal votes not later than three days before the voting day instead of 14 days. Furthermore, ZRP promoted 1 500 police officers countrywide.

CCC national spokesperson Fadzayi Mahere, published a tweet on her official Twitter account indicating that police officers are reportedly being forced to vote for ZANU-PF under the watch of their superiors and that no agents or observers are allowed to monitor the process. The Children of Zimbabwe War Veterans Association (COZWVA) also published a tweet on their official Twitter account which alleged that rigging was currently in progress at ZRP Rusape Headquarters where police officers were being forced to vote for ZANU-PF under the watchful eye of their superiors with no observers or media to monitor the process.

COZWVA also published a tweet showing images in which ZRP officers in Mutare and Rusape seemingly leaked marked presidential ballot papers in favour of opposition political party CCC leader, Nelson Chamisa. The images clearly show that independent presidential candidate, Saviour Kasukuwere is not on the ballot paper. Further, the ballot paper shows that MDC-T leader Douglas Mwonzora remains on the ballot paper despite having communicated his withdrawal from the presidential race due to the unfair treatment of his party by ZEC. The leaked presidential ballot paper also shows that President Emmerson Mnangagwa is placed at the top on the second page. This is similar to the 2018 ballot paper which had an interesting design with five candidates on the left and six candidates on the right. The 2023 presidential ballot paper design has already raised concerns.

4.4 High Court set to sit and address the urgency of application by CCC to compel ZEC to avail final voter's roll

On 14 August 2023, High Court Judge Justice Never Chitiyo ruled that the application by CCC to compel ZEC to avail the final voter's roll and list of polling stations was not urgent. As a result, CCC approached the High Court to ascertain how the Judge had reached such a ruling. Thus, the High Court will sit on 16 August to address the issue of urgency that was raised by the applicant.

5.0 Conclusion

The Forum is highly concerned by documented reports of unequal coverage of opposition political parties during the elections as well as allegations of forced voting within the Zimbabwe Republic Police as they undermine the integrity of the entire electoral process just eight days away from the scheduled harmonised election.