



Meeting of the Heads of International Election Observation Missions Held on 28th May 2024

I stand on all the protocols established by the previous speakers.

Distinguished leaders and heads of international observer missions

Ladies and gentlemen

Good Morning

The Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC countries (ECF-SADC) observation mission comprises Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) of the SADC member States. The mandate of ECF-SADC is to strengthen co-operation amongst Electoral Commissions and promote conditions conducive for credible and transparent elections in the SADC region. We are a technical Mission by virtue of us being electoral management experts and implementers of the electoral process.

ECF-SADC received an invitation from the Independent Electoral Commission of South Africa on 20th March 2024 to observe the National and Provincial Elections to be held on 29th May 2024 in the Republic of South Africa. In line with its mandate of strengthening cooperation amongst Electoral Commissions in the SADC region, the ECF-SADC has deployed an Observation Mission to these elections.

The Election Observer Mission of the Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC countries (ECF-SADC) is led by myself, Mwangala F. Zaloumis, SC, and Chairperson of the Electoral Commission of Zambia. I am supported by my deputy, Hon. Justice Jacobs C.M. Mwambegele, Chairperson of the Independent National Electoral Commission of Tanzania.

The ECF SADC's mission started on the 17th May and will end on the 2nd June 2024. It comprises of 42 members from twelve (12) Member Commissions out of 15 members. These are electoral commissions of Angola, Botswana, DRC Congo,

Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania, Zambia, Zanzibar and Zimbabwe. This makes 80% of the ECF-SADC Membership turn out to these elections which is very impressive. We are honored to have 5 Chairpersons, 10 Commissioners, 4 CEOs and a total of 15 senior officials from these member commissions. The Mission is coordinated by 7 officials from Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe and ECF-SADC Secretariat under the leadership of the ECF-SADC Executive Secretary.

The Mission has deployed eight (8) teams in the period 26th to 30th May 2024 to cover four provinces namely Gauteng, North West, Limpopo and Free State.

Before sharing some of our observations, it is important to note that, the ECF-SADC undertook a pre-election assessment visit to South Africa on 14-19 April 2024. In light of its observations during the visit, the ECF-SADC Mission made the following recommendations:

- To engage the judiciary to develop a time frame and guidelines on the disposal of election related cases in good time before elections.
- To continue to invest in the use of Political Liaison Committees as an alternative dispute resolution platform as it has proved to be working well.
- Advocate for electoral reforms that compel political parties to have quota systems for women candidates during elections.
- The need to provide and strengthen security for electoral personnel and election materials.
- To continue to accelerate its efforts to build public confidence and trust in its integrity of the electoral processes.
- Enhance voter sensitization and education in relation to the new electoral amendments as specified in Section 24(A) on the new provision for voting where voters are registered and the introduction of a third ballot to accommodate independent candidates.

In its engagement with IEC South Africa in April 2024, the Mission observed that the IEC RSA has made strides to implement administrative and legal reforms in line with election observation recommendations made in 2019 and 2021 elections.

The Mission observed:

1. That the IEC RSA has made technical and procedural changes on training of electoral staff to address inconsistencies at voting stations.
2. The IEC has introduced online voter registration to address the low youth turn out at the previous election.

Preparedness of IEC South Africa

- i. The ECF SADC Observer Mission met with the IEC on 21st May, 2024 to assess the preparedness of the Commission to hold credible elections in line with the Revised Principles for Election Management, Monitoring and Observation in the SADC region (PEMMO) and the Revised SADC Principles Governing Democratic Elections in the SADC region. The Mission's key observation is that the IEC is ready to conduct elections on 29th May, 2024. The readiness is in terms of its logistical and financial capacity to execute its mandate. IEC South Africa also shared the challenges it faced in the build up to elections and these included inter alia delayed printing of ballot papers due to unconcluded court cases and this put enormous pressure on the IEC. The Mission also observed that despite the high number of political entrants in the electoral process and the change in the electoral system by the addition of independent candidates, the Commission stands ready to conduct the elections.

MEETINGS WITH STAKEHOLDERS

On 23rd May, 2024, the Mission met with various stakeholders comprising of political parties, civil society, media and experts from academia. The Stakeholders in attendance highlighted the following matters to the Mission;

With respect to IEC's Preparedness

- The organizations all expressed satisfaction that the IEC is ready to conduct elections and expressed confidence in the IEC. The organizations indicated that they worked well with the IEC in their respective areas of specialization.
- The political parties were concerned that the IEC was not enforcing some of offences in the Electoral Code of Conduct especially where the incidences border on criminal behavior.

- There was a general observation that there could be voter apathy among the youth.

With respect to Media and Election

- There was consensus that there was increased misinformation and disinformation targeting the IEC and various electoral processes.
- The media generally worked well with the IEC.
- The media has created partnerships with platforms such as Tik Tok and Meta to combat misinformation and disinformation.
- The media was creating tools to address misinformation and disinformation.
- The media was addressing incidences of intimidation and harassment of journalists.

Political Party Participation

- The parties agreed that though they were anxieties on political violence, the levels of intolerance were not high except for areas like Kwazulu Natal where they were incidences of violence between the MK Party and the ANC.
- Some political parties had also experienced incidences of violence and being prohibited from campaigning in certain areas considered to be strongholds.
- The political parties all reported that some of their posters were either being defaced or removed.
- The political parties also informed the Mission that funding for small political parties remained a challenge.
- When queried whether independent candidates would have impact on the elections, all political parties were of the view that the independent candidates would not have a big impact on the elections.
- All the political parties agreed that the IEC was prepared for the elections
- On the media, all the political parties agreed that they needed more media coverage.

OBSERVATIONS FROM THE GROUND

Between 25th May, 2024 and 26th May, 2024, the Mission observed the final political rallies held in Gauteng Province and found them to be very peaceful and there was adequate security. The teams also observed Special Voting on 27th May, 2024. In all voting stations visited, voting was generally peaceful and orderly. However the teams observed that some voting stations opened late due to lack of stationary.

The teams also observed that not all election staff were identifiable and some voting stations did not have security personnel. We are confident that these challenges will be addressed by the IEC in time for the voting day on 29th May, 2024.

The teams continue to be on the ground to observe the voting day and counting proceedings on 29th May, 2024 in the areas of operations.

I THANK YOU

Mwangala Zaloumis, SC.
ECF-SADC Mission Leader, Zambia.
28th May 2024.