

STATEMENT ON THE 3 FEBRUARY 2024 BY-ELECTIONS

"...therefore brethren, select from among you seven men (and by inference women too) of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task ..." (Acts 6v3)

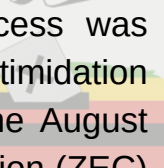
The Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), guided by its theological foundations and in accordance with its #iprayivote campaign, diligently observed the 3 February 2024 by-elections. Elections are a process of choosing leadership, a process which is valued by the church as it has biblical precedence (such as in Acts 1:12-26). The Church's participation in electoral processes is based on its love and concern for the country, especially for the poor, the marginalized, the unemployed and those rejected by society.

The 3 February 2024 by-elections were conducted under the provisions of Section 39(2) of the Electoral Act (Chapter 2:13) and is a response to additional recalls of six (6) Members of Parliament and 17 Councilors affiliated to the Citizen Coalition for Change (CCC) political party on the 7th of November 2023. The ZCC expressed its profound concerns regarding the recalls of legislators and councilors elected in August 2023 harmonized elections.

The recalls disrespected the will of the electorate (voters), intensified political polarization in the country, weakened the legislative capacity and quality of the 10th Parliament, it also grips the nation into a perpetual electoral mode; imposes a heavy fiscal strain on the country and are a threat to democracy as much as they are a significant impediment to the country's post August 2023 development efforts.

Despite all these concerns, ZCC deployed an Ecumenical Election Observation Mission (EEOM) comprised of 85 local observers for the 3 February 2024 by-elections. The decision was informed by our theological mandate and the need to observe the elections for evidence building and to inform the follow-up nation building processes as we journey with the people of Zimbabwe. Our observation also focused on evaluating the implementation of key recommendations put forth by various local, regional and international observer missions following the disputed 23 August 2023 Harmonized Elections.

The ZCC issued two update reports on the election day and following the closing of the polls. This final statement is issued following the finalization of the counting processes and the declaration of results for the elections. The 3rd of February 2024 by-elections were predominantly peaceful, marked by a well-organized, efficient, and effective election-day administration. All the 85 polling stations observed opened on time and had adequate voting materials, security personnel



behaved professionally and maintained peace, the voting and vote counting process was transparent, and no political party conducted an “exit poll survey” nor was there any intimidation antics observed. This is a great improvement from the inefficient administration of the August 2023 Harmonized Elections. The Church commends the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) for the improved administration of the elections.

However, the Church expresses deep concern regarding the widespread voter apathy observed during the elections. According to the data collected by our observers, the average voter turnout for the observed constituencies was 23.2%. Comparably, the 26 March 2022 by-elections were much better as they recorded turnout just below 50%. This shows that the voters or people of Zimbabwe in general have lost trust in electoral processes. Zimbabweans today seem to consider elections as a ceremonial process rather than a democratic way to express their preferences for desired leadership. This speaks to the larger discontent with the nature of our political processes and our democratic trajectory.

The Church strongly asserts that recalling elected officials by individuals or political parties is a disconcerting act that disrespects the will of the electorate. Such actions, driven by a power-focused agenda, blatantly neglect the wishes of Zimbabwean voters and is imposing huge costs to the nation. This not only undermines the fundamental significance of elections as a process designed to accurately portray the will of the people but also diminishes the overall importance of elections to genuinely reflect the collective desires of the citizens.

This regression in constitutional democracy, where elected representatives can be recalled without due regard for the electorate stands as a pivotal factor contributing to voter apathy which was evident during the 3 February 2024 by elections. When leaders are elected by a small segment of society, their ability to truly represent the people becomes compromised. It is deeply concerning that we now have Members of Parliament (MPs) who secured their positions with the support of only 10% of the registered voters in their constituencies. In the Phelandaba-Tshabalala constituency for instance, only 2465 out of the 22,803 registered voters participated in the just-ended by-election, leaving out a substantial 20,338 potential voters whose voices were not heard. Our current context is demonstrating that electoral processes are failing to serve as a process that reflects the collective will of the people.

The 3 February 2024 by-elections have further decimated the little confidence the electorate had in the electoral process in Zimbabwe. The Church urges reconsideration of our political actions and the conduct of our electoral processes. Restoring the integrity of elections is paramount in fostering a democratic society where the voice of the people remains a cornerstone of good governance. This is crucial considering our aspirations for the transformation of our country.

There is need to reconsider amending the law to restrict the process of recalling elected leaders exclusively to voters. This shift towards a voter-centric approach not only reinforces democratic values but also reduces the risk of strategic recalls driven by partisan interests. Furthermore, restricting the recall mechanism to voters fosters transparency and accountability, preventing potential abuse by narrow interest groups and reinforcing the idea that elected officials are accountable to the broader constituency that entrusted them with their mandate.

In addition, we urge the people of Zimbabwe and stakeholders to have a thorough review of the Electoral Act to establish a minimum voter turnout percentage that must be met for an election to be considered constitutionally valid. Above all, we urge Zimbabweans not to lose hope but rather persevere in engaging actively in elections and crucial nation-building processes to find solutions to the challenges we are facing as a country.

The church continues to reiterate its call for a comprehensive and inclusive dialogue on nation building. Political leaders need to find each other and lead the nation in promoting tolerance, peace and national cohesion.

“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. “ (Philippians 2:3)

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