



## VOTER REGISTRATION ENDS WITH A WHIMPER

**A campaign to register voters for next year's election ended almost unmarked, with many people saying they were unaware of the three-month long process.**

**From Joseph Sithole in Harare**

Zimbabwe's joint presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for next year have generated much controversy. While the ballot has been flagged up as a watershed event for both the ruling party and the opposition, some analysts are warning that it could turn out to be a damp squib.

They argue that the elections, which will pit the ZANU-PF party of President Robert Mugabe against the fractured opposition Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, may not be as exciting as the interest they have generated locally and internationally.



Credit: Lazete

People line up at a voter registration centres in Harare to beat the August 17 deadline. Picture taken August 16, 2007.

**The elections may not be as exciting as the interest they have generated.**

Among the reasons cited for these gloomy predictions are voter apathy, lack of publicity, and the inability of millions of Zimbabweans outside the country to register for the ballot. The nationwide voter registration process ended almost unnoticed on August 17. Many people

### NEWS IN BRIEF

■ At its August 16-17 summit in Lusaka, the Southern African Development Community failed to censure Zimbabwe's embattled President Robert Mugabe, and instead pledged to assist his government weather the ongoing economic crisis.

■ ZANU-PF is reportedly moving people from rural areas to register as urban voters for next year's joint presidential and parliamentary elections to strengthen its chances in the towns, seen as opposition strongholds.

■ Zimbabwe's neighbours have reduced electricity supplies because of Harare's ballooning debt, raising fears of a fresh round of power cuts in a country already weighed down by growing economic problems. Zimbabwe imports 35 per cent of its electricity from South Africa, Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

■ The electricity shortage has led to hundreds of women giving birth in the dark. Managers at hospitals and clinics around the country said a number of babies had died at birth because of poor sanitary facilities and lack of power.

■ President Mugabe said on August 20 that his government would forge ahead with plans for tougher action against businessmen who defy a directive to reduce prices.

■ The government has re-registered 42 private abattoirs so that they can slaughter cattle and supply beef to butcheries countrywide, to ease meat shortages. It said the approved abattoirs should buy stock and sell meat at the reduced prices set by the government.

who should have put their names down said they were wholly ignorant of the three-month long campaign launched in May. As well as the general lack of information, critics complained that the registration process was manipulated to exclude opposition supporters.

The joint elections have been tentatively set for March 2008, but fears of a low turnout have already prompted talk of a postponement to next June.

John Mlilo, from Mataga, 450 kilometres south of the capital Harare, was typical of rural residents who were caught unawares by the voter registration effort.

**“I doubt if anybody registered to vote in this ward” — rural resident.**

“It is unusual for people to be registered for elections this early. Perhaps there was something wrong,” he said. “Normally they register people at the local primary school but this time there was nothing. I doubt if anybody registered to vote in this ward because we would have heard about it.”

The mobile voter registration teams have two components — members of the government appointed Electoral Supervisory Commission, and staff from the Registrar General's Office who issue birth certificates and national identification documents to those who do not have them, as this is a prerequisite for voting.

Mlilo said he had heard that “Mugabe people” were issuing IDs and birth certificates, but not that voters were being registered.

A political scientist at the University of Zimbabwe said many people in urban as well as rural areas may have missed the deadline because the registration campaign was poorly

advertised and was overshadowed by more immediate political developments.

“The timing of the registration exercise was very poor,” said the political scientist, who did not want to be named. “Every day, people are being told about talks taking place in South Africa, while back home people are being quietly registered to vote. It's just too packed and confusing,” he said.

One such headline news story is the ongoing mediation process between ZANU-PF and the MDC. In March, South African president Thabo Mbeki was mandated by the Southern African Development Community to try to bring the two sides to the negotiating table to seek a political settlement to Zimbabwe's eight-year crisis, which has seen inflation soaring to over 4,500 percent, unemployment above 80 per cent and a mass exodus of economic refugees to neighbouring countries and beyond.

Then there is the price-cutting blitz launched by the government last month, which has led to widespread shortages and crippled public transport. Queues for scarce commodities such as the staple maize meal, sugar, salt, cooking oil and paraffin have become the order of the day in all urban centres.

**“The timing of the registration exercise was very poor” — Harare-based analyst.**

Finally, prospective voters may have been distracted by the long holidays around Heroes' Day, August 11.

The analyst said the ZANU-PF's low-key approach to registering voters was cause for concern. This was true even in those rural areas where ZANU-PF can normally expect a clear majority.

“There is definitely something afoot,” he said. “The elections may be no more than symbolic. ZANU-PF is already manufacturing figures and names before the election dates are known to the rest of the nation,” he said.

He noted that only about 80,000 names had been added to the electoral roll, a tiny amount set against the estimated three million who are believed to have left Zimbabwe in search of work abroad. The figure of 80,000 was only twice the national average for a single constituency, he said.

**“The elections may be no more than symbolic. ZANU-PF is already manufacturing figures and names” — analyst.**

A low turnout, especially among its supporters, would not be in the government's interests, given a plan to elect more members to parliament than before. A controversial constitutional amendment being pushed by ZANU-PF would increase the number of seats in the lower house from 150 to 210 and from 66 to 84 in the upper chamber.

“What I don't understand is why they are keen to increase the number of Senate [upper house] and constituency seats when all the evidence points to fewer voters next year,” he said.

There have been allegations that the voter registration campaign is being used to stop opposition supporters getting onto the electoral roll. The Zimbabwe Election Support Network, a non-government organisation that does voter education, has reported that traditional leaders in rural areas are excluding known supporters of opposition parties, for example denying them ID papers.

Fidelis Mhashu, an MDC member of parliament for Chitungwiza, 30 km southeast of Harare, claimed that some 65 residential properties in his constituency had been omitted from the document used as proof of residence. He warned that if this practice proved to be more widespread, it would prejudice the MDC in the polls.

### **Many MDC supporters “still not sure whether their party is going to participate in next year’s elections” — analyst.**

The political scientist in Harare noted that the bitter acrimony between the MDC’s two rival factions had not helped focus the minds of potential opposition voters.

“Because of their own internal problems, the two factions were unable to educate their constituents on the need to register,” he said. “Many are further still not sure whether their party is going to participate in next year’s elections or not.”

Morgan Tsvangirai, the leader of one of the MDC factions, recently warned that his party might not take part in the polls if the Mbeki-mediated talks in South Africa fail to extract sufficient concessions from the ruling party to ensure free and fair elections.

The schism has lost the MDC goodwill and credibility among its potential electorate since the 2000 general election, when it lost to the ZANU-PF only narrowly.

“We can argue about rigging and this and that but the fact remains that the MDC is never, and will never be, the same party we voted for in 2000,” said Abel Turo, a civil servant in Harare.

“The party has squandered a lot of goodwill because of internal squabbles. Many people have lost hope that it can ever beat ZANU-PF. Most of them have been frustrated out of the polling booth.

“Add to this the estimated three million Zimbabweans reportedly living in the diaspora and it gives you a bleak picture of the MDC.”

Martin Chiriga, from the poor suburb of Kuwadzana, sells mobile phone airtime cards near a voter registration centre but had not bothered to put his own name down. He said he had voted for the opposition in the past, but was no longer interested in doing so.

“They [MDC] should first sort out their problems before they can count on my vote,” said Chiriga. “Why should I vote for them when they are already fighting for power they haven’t got? Is that going to feed my children?”

At the talks in South Africa, the MDC is holding out for reforms to election legislation, a new constitution, and extending the right to vote to Zimbabweans in the diaspora. Yet even if the opposition wins on all these points, it still might not be enough.

### **MDC “has squandered a lot of goodwill because of internal squabbles” — civil servant.**

According to the political scientist at the University of Zimbabwe, allowing expatriates to vote would at best lead to the MDC winning the presidential election but losing the parliamentary poll. This, he said, would create “a constitutional crisis”.

“Because of our constituency-based voting system, even if registered, voters outside Zimbabwe would need to return home to vote in their constituencies for their MPs,” he said. “I don’t know whether the MDC is able to bring back the over three million people who have left the country since 2000 — that is, if it is true that all these people still support the opposition.

### **MDC should “sort out their problems before they can count on my vote” — disgruntled Zimbabwean voter.**

“On the other hand, if they were allowed to vote from their present locations wherever they are, they can only vote for the president, which is not constituency-based. If Tsvangirai wins, that would create a serious constitutional crisis if his party loses the parliamentary election. Because of our first-past-the-post system, it is the party with the highest number of constituency seats which forms the government, not the individual. It would really be a messy affair.”

He stressed that this scenario was “very unlikely, given that few Zimbabweans would be ready to come back home before they are certain that the crisis is being tackled more holistically. Many have already adjusted to their new environments and are trying to carve out new careers for themselves and their families.”

He concluded, “Despite the hype, next year’s election is going to be a lacklustre affair, with perhaps the lowest voter turnout we have seen in many years.”

*Joseph Sithole is the pseudonym of a reporter in Zimbabwe. ■*

# NEW INTERCEPT LAW CONDEMNED

**Wide-ranging powers to conduct surveillance are designed to extend the government's grip at a time when the international mediation effort is focused on greater openness.**

**By Joseph Sithole in Harare**

A new law allowing the security services to snoop into private correspondence, listen in to phone calls and track internet communications is the latest manifestation of growing paranoia in the Zimbabwean government, local analysts say.

Analysts say the Interception of Communications Act is part of measures to ensure ZANU-PF has an easy run in next year's elections, as it strives to retain power in the face of a devastating eight-year economic depression. Rather than opening up the space for political pluralism, as presupposed by the mediation effort led by South African president Thabo Mbeki, the government was doing exactly the opposite, they said.

**The new law gives police and other authorities to intercept letters, emails, phone calls and faxes.**

President Robert Mugabe signed the controversial bill into law on August 3 after parliament passed it on July 13.

The new law gives police and other authorities to intercept letters, emails, phone calls and faxes. Internet providers will have to install the hardware and software necessary to intercept messages. The information



Credit: Lazele

*Information Minister Sikhanyiso Ndlovu. Picture taken May 6, 2007.*

gathered will either be forwarded to special monitoring centres or rerouted there automatically.

Conventional mail can be opened if the interior minister issues a warrant to the police, civilian and military intelligence agencies or taxation service, in cases where a serious offence is believed to have been or might be committed, or where there is a perceived threat to national security. Once granted, the surveillance warrant is effective for at least three months.

Media watchdog groups and the Zimbabwean opposition have reacted with outrage.

Nelson Chamisa, a member of parliament and spokesman for the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, described the law as "an unjustifiable invasion of a person's rights".

The move showed that the government was at war with its people, he said in remarks to a local paper, adding that the regime was in "a state of paranoia and panic".

An independent journalist, who declined to be named, said the new law "exposes us all to the prying eyes of the state" and "makes privacy a privilege rather than a right for the individual".

"It reminds one of Nazi Germany and the Gestapo," he added.

**Law demonstrates Mugabe regime is in a "a state of paranoia and panic" - MDC's Nelson Chamisa.**

The international media rights group Reporters Without Borders said, "The promulgation of this law is further evidence of Mugabe's desire to keep news and information under close control. Zimbabwe had already given itself one of the world's most repressive legislative arsenals as regards press freedom. Now all forms of communication have been placed under surveillance."



The government already has draconian laws in place — the Public Order and Security Act severely restricts the activities of opposition parties, while the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act imposes stringent restrictions on private media and journalists.

A political scientist at the University of Zimbabwe in Harare said the new surveillance rules were designed to allow the Mugabe administration to monitor and outmanoeuvre its opponents.

**Intercept legislation  
“exposes us all to the  
prying eyes of the state”  
— journalist.**

“The real target of this law is the opposition,” said the academic, who did not want to be named. “Government wants to fully monitor the activities of the MDC and civic society organisations, which government accuses of working to remove it from power.... It will become easy to destabilise the opposition because the government can easily have access to all their strategies.”

However, this tough approach could prove counterproductive for the government.

“Zimbabwe is already a pariah state and the last thing one wants is further isolation. But that is precisely what the government is doing,” said the political scientist, noting that previous disputed election results had created “a crisis of legitimacy”.

He noted that democratic reforms were high on the MDC’s agenda in the South African president’s ongoing mediation efforts.

Mugabe signed the intercept law at the same time as the Anti-Terrorism Act, which allows the authorities to detain anyone suspected of involvement in “anti-Zimbabwe activities”.

**“The real target of this law  
is the opposition”  
— Harare-based analyst.**

Information Minister Sikhanyiso Ndlovu said recently that only people involved in terrorist activity needed to worry about the new laws, suggesting they were analogous to the tougher legislation that the United States and Britain introduced to counter heightened security threats.

As well as groups to whom the government is hostile, there are fears that ordinary Zimbabweans will find themselves caught in the net.

**“The individual... is entirely  
at the mercy of the security  
authority” — lawyer.**

The Harare-based political scientist noted that electronic intercept systems work by picking up on a predetermined set of words. “It means any individual using certain names and terms can be put under surveillance even if they didn’t have any sinister motives in using that combination of terms and names,” he said.

A lawyer in Harare who asked to remain anonymous commented, “What it all boils down to is that the individual

concerned is entirely at the mercy of the security authority”.

When the bill was being debated last year, the Association for Internet Service Providers warned that private and confidential information could easily be misused by the security agencies. Communications between lawyers and clients, or doctors and patients, for example, could pass into the wrong hands. Then the only recourse for the individual concerned would be to appeal to the same minister who authorised the intercept in the first place.

**“There is a clear conflict of  
interest when a service  
provider is also expected to  
spy on his clients” —  
internet company manager.**

A senior manager with an internet firm expressed concern that service providers and mobile phone companies would effectively become agents of the state.

“This is going to cost them dearly in terms of foreign currency required to import the equipment,” he said, “but more than that, it is going to cost them in terms of business confidence. There is a clear conflict of interest when a service provider is also expected to spy on his clients and pass private information to the state.

He predicted that the public would lose confidence in provider companies, adding, “There is going to be mutual suspicion between service providers and their clients, which is very bad for business.”

*Joseph Sithole is the pseudonym of a journalist in Harare ■*

# GRAIN SUPPLIES RUNNING LOW

**Although the government insists everything is fine, domestic grain production is down on last year and imports may not cover the shortfall.**

**By Benedict Unendoro in Harare**

As food security in Zimbabwe continues to deteriorate, a famine warning agency has classed the situation there as an “emergency”, while local millers have warned that the country may soon run out of grain.

In a report on August 9, the Famine Early Warning System Network, FEWS NET, a United States agency which monitors hunger worldwide — attributed the food crisis to an ongoing economic decline made worse by a poor harvest, the government’s recent price controls and restrictions on basic commodity imports.

All these factors, the report said, have “caused a significant decrease in Zimbabwe’s food security, especially in the southwest and in urban areas”.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, a miller based in Harare said, “We collect our maize from the Grain Marketing Board depot at Murewa [a district 75 km northeast from the capital Harare] but there hasn’t been any maize there in the past few weeks. Our stocks are running out very quickly.”

He said the situation was the same at Harare’s main depot, Aspindale, where millers from the rest of the country collect their consignments.

In a recent report, The Herald, a government newspaper, revealed that the winter wheat harvest this year was half the size of last year’s, and that only 45,000 hectares instead of the projected 76,000 had been harvested.



Credit: Lazele

*A mill office in the Zimbabwean countryside. Picture from 2006.*

In June this year, FEWS NET warned that Zimbabwe faced a shortfall of one million tonnes of maize, sorghum and millet — about 800,000 tonnes of it maize. It urged the government and donor community to mobilise for an immediate and coordinated response to address the growing levels of food shortages in the country.

## **Delay in Malawian maize imports due to “logistical problems” or non-payment?**

“There is a general consensus that Zimbabwe’s 2006-2007 cereal production has to be complemented by imports of over one million [tonnes] if the country is to meet cereal requirements for the 2007/08 consumption year.”

According to FEWS NET, Zimbabwe’s domestic grain production meets only 55 per cent of the country’s needs.

The government’s grain monopoly, the Grain Marketing Board, GMB — which

was established to ensure food security, particularly in relation to staples such as maize and wheat — has dismissed reports that the country is running out of grain.

But its frantic efforts to import supplies, particularly maize, suggest otherwise.

Last month, agriculture minister Rugare Gumbo told the press that Zimbabwe was importing 200,000 tonnes of maize from Tanzania.

“We have been importing maize from Zambia and Malawi. Right now, we are finalising the modalities to import maize from Tanzania,” he said.

But a proposed deal to import 400,000 tonnes of maize from neighbouring Malawi was reportedly delayed because of Zimbabwe’s inability to pay.

In an interview with the government paper The Herald in mid-August, the GMB’s acting chief executive, Samuel Muvuti, said the maize expected from Malawi was not rolling in due to “logistical problems in that country”.

However, Malawi's finance minister Goodall Gondwe, quoted in the Nyasa Times, suggested that negotiations had focused on Zimbabwe's readiness to pay for the maize.

"We've reached an agreement and we are sure that they will pay us," he said.

According to FEWS NET, 115,000 tonnes of an expected 400,000 have so far been imported. The agency also said the World Food Programme and C-SAFE, a consortium of aid providers, are considering importing around 352,000 tonnes of maize to make up the shortfall.

### **Grain Marketing Board's ability to distribute maize "a serious concern" — report.**

But the agency has now raised doubts about whether the GMB has the capacity to distribute the grain even if enough is imported. "The GMB's ability to distribute maize is a serious concern, as in the past GMB distributions have been erratic and local shortages are common," said the latest FEWS NET report.

There is also concern that the GMB is vulnerable to political manipulation by the ruling ZANU-PF party, which has

an interest in seeing that grain goes to areas seen as loyalist rather than opposition constituencies.

While the Zimbabwe government blames crop shortages on the droughts that have ravaged the country in the past few years, its critics say the government's controversial agricultural policies are the cause.

In particular, they point to the controversial land reform programme, which the government launched in 2000 to confiscate land from white commercial farmers and redistribute it to poor and middle-income landless black Zimbabweans. Much of the land went to farmers with no experience of large-scale farming, and some went to senior regime figures who had no interest in turning the farms round.

Government critics say that like all tropical countries, Zimbabwe is naturally prone to drought, but the commercial farmers had mitigated the effects by installing modern irrigation systems, which were then vandalised and neglected during the chaotic land grab.

The GMB told the Cabinet Taskforce on Pricing on August 7 that besides the lack of maize, its work had been greatly affected by a June government directive to slash prices of goods and services in an attempt to counter soaring inflation.

In response, the taskforce told the GMB and millers to comply with the regulations or face prosecution, and warned that a law would soon be enacted to impose mandatory two-year jail terms for traders found guilty of over-pricing.

Although millers agreed to comply with the directive, they said the pricing formula was not sustainable and would only make the food situation worse.

By the time they have bought maize from the GMB, transported it to their mills, paid their workers, and taken care of other overheads including packaging, they say they make a profit of just 2,000 Zimbabwean dollars, ZWD — roughly 13 US cents — on each 10 kilogram bag.

### **ZANU- has an interest in ensuring grain goes to areas seen as loyalist rather than pro-opposition**

"They say we should sell a 10 kg bag of maize meal for 37 ZWD when it costs us 35,000 ZWD to produce it," said a miller who spoke on condition of anonymity. "It simply won't do."

*Benedict Unendoro is an IWPR contributor in Harare. ■*

The Zimbabwe Crisis Report is an initiative of IWPR-Africa's Zimbabwe Programme. This programme promotes democratization and good governance with Southern Africa and contributes to the development of a culture of human rights and the rule of law. Focusing on Zimbabwe the programme has three core components —

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