



Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum

Press Statement for Immediate Release

30 July 2013

Three of the Regional Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum Observer team were, detained for 6 hours, denied access to Zimbabwe last night, and were deported back to South Africa on the next flight out of the country.

On 29th July 2013 the Regional Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum, through the offices of the ACTION Support Centre, sought to support a regional group of election observers access to the upcoming electoral context in Zimbabwe. Delegates were drawn from Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Tanzania, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland, representing a cross section of civil society activists who sought to observe the elections and establish a strong culture of people-to-people solidarity.

The intention was that these observers would be deployed to those areas that have been under scrutiny in terms of contentious pre-election tactics employed by local officials with a history of using violence and intimidation in the areas concerned. The refusal to admit them suggests that there are still no go areas in the country that ruling government officials would prefer to keep out of the eyes of the public media.

Three of the observer team, despite having successfully obtained the necessary accreditation credentials from the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission were denied entry into Zimbabwe. The immigration officials claimed that a specific letter from the Zimbabwe Ministry of Foreign Affairs giving permission to the observers was required, despite this information never having been clearly explained to the proposed observers, and the fact that the rest of the team obtained entry without any such formalities being requested.

The Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum is gravely concerned that even those observers from within the region, who have no agenda other than to provide support to their civil society counterparts, and to produce an impartial account of the election process and the announcement of the results, have been denied access.

If the Zimbabwean Government has nothing to hide, and is confident that these elections are going to provide Zimbabweans with an opportunity to freely express their political will then there should be no concerns regarding the intention of civil society to monitor these election processes.

The ZSF acknowledges that while ultimately the solutions to the complex challenges in Zimbabwe must be owned and driven by the people of Zimbabwe the current power imbalances and the abuse of power by a minority militarised elite that has captured the state with the intention of maintaining an undemocratic position of power requires innovative forms of people-to-people solidarity.

Observant of the derogatory statements made by the Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe against the principal mediator, Ambassador Lindiwe Zulu, and the rest of the SADC appointed mediation team, and the inflammatory and anti-democratic statements made by members of the Zimbabwean military forces, there are deep concerns over the climate leading into these elections.

Concerned that the current Zimbabwean context undermines SADC regional and African Union continental structures and threatens the peace and security of the entire Southern Africa the Regional Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum:

Hereby commits itself to a three-pillared programme of action:

1. We call on SADC and the African Union, as the Guarantor of the Global Political Agreement to vigorously assert and uphold the principles enshrined in the SADC Guidelines on Governing Democratic Elections and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance knowing that there is full support from progressive civil society formations in this process for a postponement of the proposed election date until the necessary reforms that will level the electoral playing field have been put in place
2. We will be embarking on a programme of mass action that will seek the maximum participation of the citizens across the SADC Region who seek to express their solidarity with and support for the demands and concerns contained within the communiqués released by Zimbabwean civics and outlined in ***the Feya Feya Campaign document*** calling for a peaceful free and fair election
3. We will be preparing the ground for solidarity networks, and systems and structures that will be able to respond rapidly to an increase in the levels of violence and displacement that are envisaged if an election goes ahead under the current conditions. Under such circumstances the need for practical forms of people-to-people solidarity will be paramount

Finally we reassert the importance of recognising that the concerns around the current climate in Zimbabwe and the flouting of democratic principles and values is not a concern for Zimbabweans alone. Current events in Zimbabwe are a concern for all progressive forces across the region and throughout the continent of Africa.

We call on all civil society and governments in Southern Africa and beyond to join us in demonstrating a strong show of solidarity by engaging with the planned programme of mass action and amplifying a unified voice that demands that the Zimbabwean electorate be given the opportunity to freely express their democratic will in selecting their leadership without intimidation and in an open, transparent and democratic manner.

Released by the ACTION Support Centre – secretariat of the Regional Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum

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