



ZSF statement on Zimbabwe Referendum

15 March 2013

The Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum (ZSF) sends best wishes to the people of Zimbabwe on the eve of the Referendum scheduled for this weekend. We wish the people of Zimbabwe a peaceful and decisive referendum outcome and encourage effective participation of all the people of Zimbabwe in shaping Zimbabwe's destiny.

We commend the enduring resilience, dedication and sacrifices that the people of Zimbabwe have shown over the past years and we pledge our full solidarity support in their struggle for democracy. As a practical example of people to people solidarity, the ZSF is sending an accredited delegation of election observers to monitor the Referendum over the weekend. A report back meeting and press conference will be organised after the results have been announced.

The ZSF also welcomes the recent resolution of the COSATU International Relations Committee (IRC) and concurs with the observation that, albeit that the referendum provides hope and the potential to rebuild a peaceful and prosperous Zimbabwe, the situation on the ground has the dangerous potential of degenerating further into a deeper crisis, unless the ruling regime in particular, and all parties in general, are willing to facilitate and ensure the full and effective implementation of the Global Political Agreement as underwritten by SADC, and led by President, Jacob Zuma as the facilitator.

Indeed the Referendum and constitution-making process should be seen as elements of a broader package of reforms to which all parties must fully adhere and abide by towards a free and fair elections, conducted under a peaceful and conducive environment. Even if the Referendum indicates support for the adoption of the newly drafted Constitution it will only be when the measures it contains are implemented in full that the minimum conditions for a free and fair election will have been met.

Sipho Theys, of the Solidarity Transformation Agenda at the ACTION Support Centre argues that: **"A new Constitution that is not properly implemented before an election takes place will simply serve as another smokescreen that disguises the ongoing assault on the rights and freedoms of the Zimbabwean people."**

Closely monitoring the events in Zimbabwe over the past 2 months, the ZSF is concerned about the immediate and long-term implications of the escalating attacks on human rights activists and civil society organisations. These disturbing incidents include the arrest and intimidation of civil society leaders, including Jestina Mukoko, of the Zimbabwe Peace Project, Okay Machisa and Leo Chamahwinya of Zim Rights and several of the leadership and members of Women of Zimbabwe Arise.

The confiscation of radios, the rejection of accreditation applications by some of the civil society organisations that sought to monitor the Referendum, police attacks on opposition political parties gatherings, deportations of International media representatives seeking to cover the referendum and the fresh disappearances of human rights activists do not bode well for a context that should be focused on creating the conditions for an open and unfettered expression of the peoples will.

The ZSF therefore remains fully supportive of the call to ensure the full implementation of the Global Political Agreement (GPA), including the Road Map towards a free and fair election climate, and remains steadfast in its belief that any election held before these conditions have been met will result in another disputed election outcome that will take Zimbabwe, and the region back to the conditions of 2008. The Joint Monitoring and Implementation Committee (JOMIC) has a critical role to play in this period, ensuring a full report on current conditions guides the decisions made by SADC as the guarantor of the GPA.

The ZSF is committed to deepening its solidarity efforts with its civic partners in Zimbabwe, and in collaboration with the Zimbabwe Solidarity Movement from the SADC region, across the African continent, and around the world. Now is the time to use the democratic space opened up by the referendum process to call attention to the ongoing forms of repression and to build forms of organisation that can operate with vigilance and renewed vigour.

Only by working together in this critical time will we be able to ensure the creation of an enabling environment towards free and fair elections.