



**PRELIMINARY STATEMENT ON THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS  
HELD ON 20<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2015**

**23<sup>RD</sup> JANUARY 2015**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The Zambia National Women's Lobby (ZNWL) monitored the 2015 Presidential Election from a gender perspective in more than 40 districts. ZNWL has been monitoring elections since its formation in 1991 to ensure that female voters and candidates participate equally in the electoral process. From the 20<sup>th</sup> January 2015 Presidential election monitoring exercise, we have arrived at the conclusion that the election was generally peaceful.

We are pleased to note that the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) continues to observe gender in the recruitment of electoral officers and security personnel, with women accounting for at least 40% of these officials. ZNWL also observed that a good number of women were contracted to decision making positions of either assistant presiding officer or presiding officers. This is particularly important because our experience has shown that female voters are more likely to confide in female presiding officers if they are faced with a problem when voting.

**2. EMERGING ISSUES IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS**

Many issues emerged from this election and we will belabour to highlight them from a gender perspective with the hope that safe-guards can be put in place before the 2016 election is held, to enable more women participate.

## 2.1 Low Voter Turn Out

ZNWL did observe that there was low voter turnout in this election. The ECZ has revealed that 33% of voters turned up to vote. This was not impressive, especially that the majority of those that did not turn out to vote were women. This low voter turnout can be attributed to many factors that include the following:

- **Hurried manner in which the replacement of Voters' Cards was conducted by ECZ.**

Many citizens, especially women, were disenfranchised because they failed to replace their cards due to several reasons which included;

- (i) Limited information on the exercise,
- (ii) The short time frame allocated to the exercise,
- (iii) Few voters' card replacement centres and
- (iv) Lack of resources to travel to the districts where people initially registered in the case of those that had relocated.

The ECZ is by law mandated to conduct continuous voter registration. It is therefore our hope that, going forward, the registration and cleaning up of the voters roll will commence soon and be allocated sufficient resources and time to ensure that all eligible voters are captured before the 2016 elections.

- **Un conducive Weather**

Bad weather may have prevented some voters from casting their vote. Whereas it was unavoidable to hold the election in the rainy season as the date of the election was dictated by the constitutional provisions. There is need for the incoming Government to quickly adopt the long advocated for constitution which provides for progressive recommendations on ascendance to the Republican President in case of any eventuality.

- **Elections coincided with the farming season**

This election coincided with the farming season. There are rural parts of the country where we observed that some small scale farmers had relocated to farming areas to cultivate. This also negatively impacted on the voter turnout in most rural areas.

## **2.2 Insufficient Voter Education**

The ZNWL is of the view that the voter education exercise conducted by ECZ was not adequate enough to sensitise the majority of voters. Messages on voting which were mainly relayed through the print and electronic media did not reach most citizens especially those in rural areas. In this election, the ZNWL observed that most of the voters who were being assisted were women. This can be attributed to the high illiteracy levels amongst women in Zambia as compared to men. It has always been our considered view that the ECZ should implement voter education right at community level and on an on-going basis owing to the high illiteracy levels in the country. Assisted voting does not usually guarantee that the wish of the voter will be respected and takes away the very essence of a secret ballot.

We also observed with sadness that some electoral officers were directing women to remove nail varnish or forfeit their right to vote. This led to some women using unsterile instruments to remove the nail varnish. Only a few women, who insisted on voting with the nail polish like the Forum for Democracy and Development President, Ms Edith Nawakwi, were allowed to do so. This situation could have been avoided had there been sufficient information targeted at the female voters, warning them in advance on this requirement.

## **2.3 Capacity of ECZ officials**

We observed that some electoral officials did not have sufficient knowledge on conducting an election. In certain cases some senior citizens who were in possession of the old national registration cards (NRCs) were barred from voting by some election officials. This was observed from Chainda Polling station in Lusaka Central constituency where a senior citizen was turned

away because she was in possession of the old NRC. This was a very unfortunate occurrence especially that the senior citizens braved the rains to exercise her right to vote. It had to take intervention and consultation with ECZ office to allow the other senior citizens to vote with the old NRCs.

We therefore recommend that the ECZ should in future ensure that only people who are well versed with electoral procedures in conducting an election and are acquainted with the Electoral Act be contracted as electoral officials. In addition, adequate debriefings should be done to ensure that all the electoral officials are properly oriented with elections for them to be of effective assistance to voters.

We however commend the electoral officials for giving priority to expectant women, women with babies and the elderly when it came to voting. We observed this trend in many polling stations.

#### **2.4 Participation of Women in elections as voters and as candidates**

Zambia is a signatory to several international instruments in which State Parties have pledged to promote equal participation of women in the political life of their countries, either as voters or candidates. Some of these international instruments are the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Gender and Development Declaration, the African Union Protocol, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

It is therefore important that women in Zambia should actively participate in the electoral process either as voters or as candidates. Despite the fact that we had a low turnout of women voters in this election, the ZNWL would like to therefore commend the women who turned up to vote. It is important for women to exercise their democratic right to vote and we urge those that did not participate in this election for various reasons to rise to the challenge and participate in the process in 2016. This is one sure way that women can have a voice in ushering in leaders of their choice and thereby contributing to strengthening Zambia's growing democracy.

We are also happy that we had a woman candidate participating in this election, Ms Edith Nawakwi, President of the Forum for Democracy and Development . ZNWL is pleased to note that the only female candidate conducted issue based campaigns and there was no allegation of breach of the Electoral Act raised against her or her political party. We thank Ms Nawakwi for her courage and bold step to participate in a heavily contested and male dominated race.

## **2.5 Media and Gender issues in the electoral process**

With regard to media bringing out gender issues in the electoral process, we are of the view that although the female candidate was covered, this coverage left much to be desired. This is because some news stories deliberately neglected to bring out the salient issues that Ms. Nawakwi would table concentrating on issues that seemed to serve the agendas of the various media institutions.

In as much as we appreciate that each media institution reserves the right to have their own editorial policy, media ethics demand that news stories be truthful and balanced. Public media is particularly mandated by law to provide equal coverage to all candidates during an election. We feel that the only female candidate was not given adequate, objective and fair coverage by the media.

On general coverage of the election, we feel that the issues that were coming out were general issues and there was very little discussion generated by the media on issues that affect women and children.

There is need for the media in future to play a more strategic and informative role of educating voters, both men and women, on the election process and most importantly, on issues that matter to them as female or male voters. In this way, the media would be contributing to raising voters' aspirations and informed decision making for both men and women when they are voting.

### 3. CONCLUSION

We applaud ECZ under the leadership of her ladyship Justice Irene Mambilima for ensuring that the election was conducted within the confines of the Electoral Act. This was despite being faced with a lot of logistical challenges owing to the bad weather and difficult terrain in most rural places. We urge ECZ to use this election as a test case for 2016 and address all the existing gaps if the next election is to be truly free, fair and credible.

We further applaud the Zambia Police under the leadership of Inspector General Stella Libongani for the professional conduct of the Police throughout this election period. We observed that the police stuck to their role of maintaining law and order during the election and never interfered in the election in any way.

The ZNWL strongly recommends that the new President of Zambia considers, as a matter of urgency, the enactment of the draft Constitution as this is the only way to ensure that the challenges currently faced by the ECZ can be addressed.

We also applaud the Zambian people for continuing to uphold the peace that the nation has enjoyed for the past 50 years and urge every well-meaning Zambian to refuse to be used as tools of violence in the aftermath of this election.

**BEAUTY KATEBE (MS)**

**ZAMBIA NATIONAL WOMEN'S LOBBY BOARD CHAIRPERSON**