



Dear SADC Electoral Observation Mission,

I write to you on behalf of CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation concerning the 29 March 2008 harmonised elections in Zimbabwe. CIVICUS is an international organisation headquartered in Johannesburg, working to strengthen and support civil society around the world.

We have been monitoring the situation in Zimbabwe for some years and continue to be distressed by the attacks on our partner organisations within the country. As you may be aware, civil society and media continue to be silenced through restrictive laws, as well as threats and harassment.

We appeal to SADC to monitor the elections in a manner which takes into account the current and previous restrictions on public comment, as well as the ongoing intimidation of the media, civil society organisations and individual voters.

We understand that various countries from the SADC region will send around 150 observers drawn from government, parliament, political opposition and civil society to join the SADC mission to Zimbabwe. In addition to SADC, there will also be observers from five Asian countries (China, India, Malaysia, Indonesia and Iran) and four from the Americas (Brazil, Jamaica, Venezuela and Nicaragua) involved in monitoring the combined presidential, parliamentary, senate and local elections.

As you are aware, the SADC Electoral Observation Mission works within the framework of the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections, as well as the country's Electoral Laws. The Guidelines clearly outline the state's responsibility to ensuring freedom of movement, assembly, association, expression and campaigning during the election period. They also direct SADC observers to consider this in conducting their mission.

- In section 7.4 of the Guidelines, the state holding an election is directed to *"safeguard the human and civil liberties of all citizens including the freedom of movement, assembly, association, expression, and campaigning as well as access to the media on the part of all stakeholders, during electoral processes"*.
- In section 4, SADC missions are directed to determine the nature of their election mission on *"constitutional and legal guarantees of freedom and rights of the citizens"* as well as a *"conducive environment for free, fair and peaceful elections"*

Following the March 2005 elections in Zimbabwe, the SADC monitoring team was criticised for producing an election monitoring report that appeared to consider political sensitivities above truthful reporting on the elections. While civil society organisations operating in the country reported being subject to threats and harassment and the media severely curtailed, the SADC observers reported no irregularities. In supporting elections throughout the region, SADC also holds the responsibility for determining the standards by which elections and states are judged. We would highlight that by claiming unfair elections are fair, any observer risks undermining election standards and future elections processes in other countries.

Reflecting on this, the Guidelines also assert that observers *"shall maintain strict impartiality in the conduct of their duties, and shall at no time express any bias or preference in relation to national authorities, parties and candidates in contention in the Election process."*

We applaud the efforts of SADC in sending an election observation mission. We encourage the mission to ensure that it fully considers the effects of the current restrictions on civil

society and the media in determining whether the upcoming elections can truly be considered free and fair. As laid out in the SADC Guidelines, such freedoms of association, assembly and expression are essential for any election to be deemed free and fair.

We thank you for your attention to our concerns. We send you our best wishes for a successful mission.

Kind regards,

Kumi Naidoo, Secretary General  
CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation