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Mohadi Appointment – Consolidation of ZEC's capture by ZANU-PF



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Introduction

The appointment of Abigail Millicent Mohadi as a member of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) should be understood in the context of ZANU-PF's 2023 menu of electoral manipulation within the broader spectacle of competitive electoral authoritarianism. President Mnangagwa on 7 June 2022 appointed six new Commissioners of the country's election management body, ZEC. Among the appointed Commissioners is the daughter of the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party deputy president Kembo Mohadi. Abigail's mother is a senator for Beitbridge representing ZANU-PF. Marred with a credibility crisis, the appointment of Abigail Millicent Mohadi Ambrose further puts a dent on ZEC's impartiality. The appointment confirms previous Zimbabwe Democracy Institute (ZDI) assertions that ZEC lacks the fidelity to preside over credible elections in Zimbabwe. The politically designed appointment adds to other manipulation ingredients such as the appointment of retired security officials in the secretariat of ZEC. We argue that the appointment of Miss Mohadi into ZEC shows that ZANU-PF is solidifying its capture and infiltration. The appointment of a daughter of ZANU PF vice president at a time when the constituency delimitation process is ready to takeoff raises more questions.

ZEC Commissioner Appointments: Inside the menu of 2023 electoral manipulation

ZEC for a very long time has presided over disputed elections that have failed to meet regional and international standards for a free, fair and credible election.[1] The 2018 elections, for example, were marred by weakened public confidence in ZEC. Lack of trust in ZEC is attributed to a myriad of factors chief among them being appointment of partisan commissioners and role of security agents in its secretariat. The appointment of Mohadi raises two main concerns: *(i)* conflict of interests and *(ii)* incompetence – loyalty ahead of merit.

Conflict of interests

The fact that Abigail Millicent Mohadi Ambrose's father Kembo Mohadi is an interested party in Zimbabwe's elections is enough to dismiss her appointment as part of a patron-client relationship which is detrimental to the conduct of credible

[1] The European Union (EU) Election Observers Final Report Zimbabwe 2018 stated that many aspects of the 2018 elections in Zimbabwe failed to meet international standards due to the restrictions on political freedoms, the excessive use of force by security forces and abuses of human rights in the post-election period undermined the corresponding positive aspects during the pre-election campaign. Available at: https://www.veritaszim.net/sites/veritas_d/files/EU%20Election%20Observers%20Final%20Report%20Zimbabwe%202018-.pdf.

elections in Zimbabwe. Thus, she cannot be an independent commissioner as she is supposed to be, in electoral processes involving his father who is a deputy president of ZANU-PF party – an election contestant. This conflict of interests also applies to the military personnel who serve in ZEC and are conflicted on the basis of their historical links with ZANU-PF whereby both Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) and Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) forces – now the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA), were military wings affiliated to ZANU and Patriotic Front Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) - now ZANU-PF. ZANU-PF spokesperson Chris Mutsvangwa has public pronounced that the military is part of ZANU PF. The military's conflict of interests in Zimbabwe's electoral process can be traced back to the country's previous disputed elections. For example in 2000, 2002, 2008, 2013 and 2018 the security forces were involved in alleged gross human rights violations and state-sponsored violence against the opposition, human rights defenders and other democratic forces.[2] The same conflict of interests by members of the security sector applies to Mohadi who was appointed on the basis of a patron-client relationship.

Loyalty over merit in Mohadi Appointment – ZEC's credibility crisis

The appointment of Abigail Millicent Mohadi Ambrose was done on the basis of loyalty instead of competence. In a functional constitutional democratic country, Mohadi Ambrose's scandalous interview was not going to lend her the ZEC Commissioner post. This appointment took the undesirable loyalty route at the expense of merit. In one of the interview questions, Mohadi failed to articulate the role of ZEC. One therefore wonders how she is going to execute her duties when she does not know the motive behind the constitutional establishment of ZEC.

The timing of Mohadi appointment

The appointment of Mohadi came at a time when ZEC is finalizing modalities for conducting the constituency delimitation process. This process is potentially an ingredient inside the menu for electoral manipulation as the country heads towards the 2023 elections. This is substantiated by the ZANU-PF politburo member Ziyambi Ziyambi who said their party will play a leading role in the demarcation of constituency boundaries in preparation of 2023 elections. He said:

> "…We, as the governing party, will lead the delimitation process. You cannot say that you are ruling and

[2] The Human Rights Watch in 2013 reported that members of the security forces were involved in violence targeted at the opposition. The report *The Elephant in the Room Reforming Zimbabwe's Security Sector Ahead of Elections* is accessible here: http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/zimbabwe0613webwcover_0.pdf.

> do things that result in you getting out of power. There is no political party that boots itself out of power. As Zanu PF, we must do things that we are all agreeable to as we come up with electoral boundaries. We will have another meeting to discuss how the delimitation process is going to be conducted."[3]

Before the utterances by Ziyambi Ziyambi, it made little sense that ZANU-PF was going to lead the constituency delimitation process. However, the appointment of Mohadi openly confirmed the authoritarian consolidation of ZEC's capture by ZANU-PF for purposes of spicing up the menu for electoral manipulation in Zimbabwe. As confirmed by ZEC Chairperson Priscilla Chigumba that the new Commissioners including Mohadi will be assigned to provinces to oversee the delimitation process, it follows that Ziyambi Ziyambi's unconstitutional and illegal remarks have been fulfilled.

Conclusion

The appointment of Abigail Millicent Mohadi Ambrose is a clear testament that ZEC is far from being independent as per the requirements of the Constitution of Zimbabwe under sections 234, 235 and 236. It presents the consolidation of capture and infiltration of ZEC by ZANU-PF that will lead to another disputed outcome of the 2023 election as was the case of previous elections. The brazen announcement of election loser as victor (the case of Dexter Nduna of ZANU-PF party and Gift Konjana of the then opposition Movement for Democratic Change Alliance (MDC Alliance in the 2018 election) is feared in 2023 as ZEC has now openly become dependent on ZANU-PF – one of the election contestants.

Recommendations

Cognizance of the importance of credible elections in setting a tone for sustainable development, the ZDI in line with its aim to advance democracy, development, good governance and human rights in Zimbabwe offers the following recommendations for consideration by stakeholders:

To the Parliament of Zimbabwe

- ✓ Reverse the appointment of Abigail Millicent Mohadi Ambrose and make another appointment in line with sections 234, 235 and 236 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe.
- ✓ Appoint Commissioners on the basis of merit and not loyalty to build public trust in ZEC.

[3] For more details, see NewZimbabwe.com. 2022. Minister says Zanu PF to lead delimitation of constituencies; shock utterance seen to confirm 2023 rigging plot. Available at: https://www.newzimbabwe.com/ziyambi-utterances-confirm-zanu-pf-fixing-constituency-boundaries-to-rig-2023-elections/.

To the civil society

- ✓ Petitioning regional and international bodies such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and African Union (AU) over ZEC's lack of independence.

To the media

- ✓ Report on the infiltration and pollution of ZEC by ZANU-PF linked people as typified by the appointment of Abigail Millicent Mohadi Ambrose to the position of a Commissioner on the backdrop of a scandalous interview.