



# Zimbabwe Election Support Network

# ZESN

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## PRESS STATEMENT

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### ZESN Statement on the passing of the Constitutional Amendment No. 17 Bill

The Zimbabwe Election Support Network, a coalition of 35 non-governmental organisations is concerned by the passing of the Constitutional Amendment No. 17 Bill.

ZESN feels that the re-introduction of the bi-cameral parliament is untimely taking into cognizant the country's current prevailing socio-economic and political challenges.

It is disturbing to note that after all the efforts that were shown by the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs, which held one public hearing owing to financial constraints as reported in the public media on the aforementioned Bill, the government is not bothered to incorporate the inputs and ideas from various stakeholders.

Having presented its views to the Committee, ZESN's major concern is that the Bill did not take into consideration some of the fundamental issues that were raised by various civic bodies and other stakeholders especially on the issue of the senate among other issues which curtail civil liberties in the country. This undermines the role of the Portfolio Committees in the legislative process and these Committees will risk not to be taken serious in future debates. Among other proposals by various civic organisations, ZESN had proposed that the senate be established by proportional representation using the March 2005 election results and this would ensure that all sectors of the society were adequately represented.

It is also distressing to note that the most important stakeholder, the citizen of Zimbabwe who is expected to vote at the end of the day, was not consulted in the process.

The network continues to be disturbed by the intention of the passed Bill which empowers the President to appoint sixteen of the proposed sixty six senators. It is noteworthy that the appointment of thirty non – constituency members of parliament is already a contentious matter and ZESN believes that the appointment of the unelected senators will compromise the democratic process which the country is striving for.

ZESN re-emphasizes its concern on the continued holding of elections when there are still pending challenges in court on the March 2005 elections and other fundamental issues of the economy which needs to be sorted out. The network believes that given the above mentioned background, this will strongly exacerbate voter apathy and further polarize the country.

ZESN commends the abolition of the Electoral Supervisory Commission (ESC) and establishment of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission as the sole body in charge of the running and management of elections. ZESN is however concerned on the manner in which the appointment of ZEC members would be done as much power had been again invested in the President to appoint the Chairperson of the Commission. In addition we feel some problems will still remain in the overall administration of elections if the Registrar-General and Election Directorate remain in place. The Registrar-General and the Elections Directorate play key roles in election administration are

widely seen as politically partisan. These must be removed and their functions must be placed under the control of ZEC. We need to see a ZEC which is a truly independent body responsible for running and managing all elections issues in the country.

In view of the economic challenges, disputes and other pending issues that have characterized previous elections and have been raised by various stakeholders. ZESN believes that **the country's is not ready to hold any elections soon**. ZESN strongly recommends that the government should serious consider all contentious issues that have been raised by various stakeholders in order to hold credible elections. ZESN reiterates the call by other stakeholders for an overhaul of the constitution of Zimbabwe. Ends//