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ZEC COVID- 19 POLICY ON ELECTORAL ACTIVITIES

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1.0 Preamble

The novel Coronavirus (Covid-19) which is a respiratory ailment was declared a Global pandemic by the World Health Organization on 11 March 2020. His Excellency the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe followed suit on the 17th of March 2020 by declaring the pandemic a national disaster and instituted a raft of measures meant to curtail/curb the spread of the disease. These measures were complemented by the passage of Statutory Instrument 83 of 2020(Public Health (COVID-19 Prevention, Containment and Treatment) (National Lockdown) Order, 2020 by the Government to guide the nation on how to deal with the pandemic. The Commission subsequently issued a press statement on 25 March 2020 suspending all electoral activities under its mandate in terms of (Section 239) of the Constitution.

Regular elections are fundamental to the proper functioning of a representative democracy. While the Commission had to take the necessary steps to suspend all electoral activities during the national lockdown it did not lose sight of the need to find ways of ensuring that the constitutional right to elections is not curtailed indefinitely. To this end the Commission has come up with a raft of measures which are intended to ensure that the suspension on the conduct of electoral activities is lifted and ensure that it carries out its Constitutional mandate in terms of Section 239 whilst also meeting the requirements put in place by authorities as precautions against the contraction and spread of the corona virus. The Commission further ascertained other electoral activities that do not involve direct engagement with the public. In this regard the filling-in of the Proportional Representation vacancies that occur in Parliament is relevant and necessary.

2.0 Aim of the Policy

This policy document is meant to provide guidance on procedures and conduct of electoral activities/processes in a Covid-19 prone environment. This stems from the realization that the pandemic will be with the world for some time to come and it is now the “*New Normal*”, hence the need to navigate through it.

3.0 Target Audience

This Policy document is meant to assist and safeguard the following people among others during the conduct of electoral processes namely:

- ZEC Commissioners and Staff Members
- Staff Seconded to ZEC for electoral duties

- The Electorate
- Political Players (Candidates, Supporters and Political Parties)
- Media
- Electoral Observers
- Other Electoral Stakeholders

NB: The policy must be read together with the National Health Act, Statutory Instruments relating to Covid -19 and the National Policy on the virus.

4.0 Electoral Processes and Covid-19 Preventive Measures

The Commission is mandated to carry out a number of electoral processes in the discharge of its mandate. The processes include Voter Registration; Voter Education; Setting Up Nomination Courts; Conduct of Poll (By-elections); Announcement and Publication of Results among other essential administrative activities. With the advent of the Covid -19 pandemic and in the interests of public health and safety as well as the need to uphold the right to vote and representation, the Commission will be guided by the National Health Policy on Covid -19 in all its activities. The following are the interventions which will be reviewed when necessary;

4.1 Voter Registration

- Voter registration will be done at all the ZEC offices in the Provinces and Districts
- Any person seeking to be registered and all visitors to ZEC offices will be subject to temperature checks and sanitizing before entry and the social distancing of at least one metre for all persons and visitors.
- It will be **compulsory** for all persons entering ZEC premises to be wearing face masks.
- All Biometric Registration Kit components especially the fingerprint scanner to be wiped down with disinfectant or sanitizer (not spraying or pouring the fluid) before use by the next voter.
- Voters can inspect the voters' roll using the online link bvrinspection.zec.org.zw on the ZEC website.
- The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission will provide mobile (USSD) platform that can also be used to check voters' registration details.
- The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission be categorized as an essential service provider to facilitate freedom of movement during an election in a lockdown environment.

4.2 Nomination Courts

- Nomination forms can be downloaded from the ZEC website www.zec.org.zw collected from ZEC Offices.

- Those unable to download the forms may pick up nomination forms from any ZEC office but shall be subject to compulsory temperature checks and sanitizing before entry.
- It will be **compulsory** for all persons entering ZEC premises to be wearing face masks.
- The mandatory social distancing shall be maintained in the Nomination Courts.
- It shall not be necessary for aspiring candidates or their representatives to remain in the Nomination Court once their nomination papers have been adjudged to be in order and accepted by the nomination officer. The public announcement of the successful candidates will be made at the close of proceedings by nomination officers.
- Aspiring candidates are encouraged to lodge Nomination Court papers in advance at ZEC offices in order to decongest nomination courts on nomination day.
- Limited numbers of people will be allowed to access Nomination Courts upon meeting conditions stipulated by ZEC in line with statutory guidance on gatherings issued from time to time.
- A nomination court register of attendees will be introduced for the purposes of contact tracing should the need arise.

4.3 At the Polling Stations

- The Presiding Officer shall ensure disinfection and regular cleaning of polling stations and ablution facilities.
- The Presiding Officer shall ensure that an Attendance Register is maintained for all persons visiting the polling station for contact tracing purposes.
- Election officials, Voters, Polling Agents and Election Observers are to wash their hands thoroughly using soapy running water, be sanitized upon entering and exiting polling stations, wear face masks, maintain social distancing and have temperature checks before commencement of any electoral activity.
- The Commission shall provide adequate gloves for all the electoral officers during all stages of the electoral process.
- For composite polling stations, temperature checks should be centralized and a screening certificate issued out to all persons entering polling stations.
- Persons whose temperature is lower or higher than the recommended national standard ranges are recorded and not allowed into polling stations. Such persons shall be advised to visit their nearest health-centres.
- Polling stations to be arranged in such manner as to allow the required social distancing to be observed.
- The pens provided at the polling station should be sanitized after use by each voter. Voters are however allowed to bring and use their own pens if they so wish.
- Regular disinfection of polling booths during polls to be carried out.
- Numbers of voters, polling agents/observers to in the polling station to be regulated periodically in order to allow for social distancing.
- Where possible voting material for voters should be single-use or disinfected between users while minimizing handling of shared items.
- All polling re-usable materials to be disinfected before storage.

- Display of Covid-19 Information Education Communication materials to inform voters of the physical distances and other health regulation to be observed at the polling station.
- Polling shall take place between 7am and 7pm. However anyone in the queue at close of poll shall not be turned away.

5.0 Voter Education

- Voter Education shall be conducted using print and electronic media.
- Public Gatherings for Voter education are discouraged. If these are un-avoidable, the number shall not exceed the maximum number of people permitted per gathering from time to time through statutory instruments. All Covid-19 preventive measures to be adhered to and all participants to be recorded to allow for contact tracing should the need arise.
- Loud hailers will be used to conduct voter education.
- SMS platform to be used to conduct voter education.
- Deployment of voter educators on the ground to be minimised.
- ZEC to collaborate with community leaders, churches, civil society to spread information.
- Commission VE materials to include Covid-19 preventive measures awareness messages.
- Display of voters' rolls at polling stations at least two days prior to polling day.

6.0 Recruitment and Training of Electoral Officers

- The recruitment of Electoral Officers and their training should be localized.
- During the conduct of Constituency Elections the cascading method will be used as follows; Constituency –Ward – Polling Station.
- Presiding Officers will train their officers at their polling stations.
- The contact details of all facilitators, trainees and all persons visiting the training venue must be recorded to allow for contact tracing should there be need.
- Wearing of face masks, constant hand sanitization and temperature checks are mandatory at all training venues.
- Where possible trainings should be carried out on-line or on virtual platforms.
- All electoral stakeholders are encouraged to localise the recruitment, training and deployment of personnel to reduce the scale of movements during any electoral activity.

7.0 Command Centres

Duties at the Command centres to be multi-tasked in order to reduce congestion. Only accredited persons shall be allowed inside Command Centres. All Commission offices in areas conducting By-elections will act as information centres while periodic updates will be posted on the Commission web-site as the need arises.

8.0 Logistics

The following Departments may move from Head Office to areas where by-elections will be held to discharge their respective functions namely Elections and Training; Election Logistics and Accreditation.

9.0 Proposed Covid-19 Kit

The Commission shall provide the following for all its electoral activities for both the electoral officers and clientele;

- Thermometers (certified) at electoral centres
- Sanitizers/hand washing buckets and with running soapy water
- Masks for electoral staff and where necessary for voters (though voters are expected to leave their homes wearing face masks in compliance with the national covid-19 measures)
- Gloves for electoral officials
- Disinfectants for places used for electoral activities i.e. polling stations, nomination courts and election materials.
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for all electoral officials.

10.0 Proportional Representation Electoral Activities.

Electoral Processes in the Filling of Proportional Representation vacancies:

The Commission is mandated to fill in vacancies occurring among the party –list members of the Senate or of the National Assembly, otherwise than through a dissolution of Parliament (section 39 (7) Electoral Act 2:13)

The processes involved in the filling of Proportional Representation vacancies are as outlined below and will only involve skeletal personnel from the Commission, Parliament and political party representatives.

a) Notification of a vacancy

In the event of a vacancy occurring among the party-list members of the Senate or of the National Assembly, the President of the Senate or the Speaker, as the case may be, shall notify the **Commission** of the vacancy, after he or she becomes aware of it.

b) Notifying the public

The Commission shall notify the public of the vacancy by notice in the Gazette.

c) Submission of name(s) by political party

The Commission shall invite the political party in writing to submit the name of a qualified person to fill the vacancy for which purpose the political party must lodge with the Commission a nomination paper in the prescribed form.

d) Scrutinising of the nomination paper

The Chief Elections Officer shall scrutinize the nomination paper, inform the office-bearers concerned that the papers are in order or request them to make such corrections or alterations to or supply such clarifications as are required in the interests of accuracy and ensuring conformity with the Electoral Act.

e) Notifying the public of the nomination to fill the vacancy in the Gazette

When the Chief Elections Officer is satisfied that the nomination paper is in order, the Commission shall:

- i) Notify the public of the nomination to fill the vacancy by notice in the Gazette, giving the name, address and such other particulars of the party-list candidate as it considers necessary in the interests of public information and
- ii) Afford any person who is a voter an opportunity to lodge any written objection (together with reasons for the objection) to the nomination within a specified time from the date of publication of the notice in the Gazette.

f. Notifying the public of the person appointed as Senator or member of the National Assembly to fill the vacancy in the Gazette.

- i). If no objection to the party – list candidate has been received or having considered every objection received, it finds that there are no valid grounds for objecting to the candidature the Commission shall notify the public by notice in the Gazette that the person nominated to fill the vacancy has been appointed as a Senator or member of the National Assembly with effect from the date of the notice, giving the name, address and such other information as it considers necessary in the interests of public information or
- ii) Having considered every objection received, and having found that there are valid grounds for objecting to the candidature, afford the political party concerned to make representations on the matter.

