



CATHOLIC COMMISSION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE IN ZIMBABWE (CCJPZ)
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CCJPZ 26 MARCH 2022 PRE-BY ELECTION STATEMENT

“Journeying together with the Church, Voting peacefully is Every Citizen’s Responsibility”

Peace Be with You!

As the nation prepares for the March 26, 2022 By-Elections, as proclaimed on 06 January 2022, by His Excellency President Emmerson Mnangagwa, the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe (CCJPZ), the social arm of the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops’ Conference (ZCBC), encourages all citizens to vote peacefully. ZCBC reaffirms the call by the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD) By-Elections statement titled: *“The Elections We Want”*, in which as church leaders, “We understand that the by-elections are a necessary constitutional process so as to ensure that the power of the electorate in choosing their parliamentary or local authority representatives remains with them.” This quote aptly exhorts all eligible citizens to participate in the by- elections in the vacant National Assembly and Local Authorities seats. We are asking you therefore, to make the best use of your vote for the good of our country.

As the Catholic Church embarks on a Synodal journey until 2023 through communion, participation and mission, the Holy Father, Pope Francis, reminds us all that, “the synodal process starts by listening to the people, who even participate in the prophetic office of Christ.” The Church, guided by the Social Teachings of the Church (STCs) principles of respect for human life, dignity of the human person, participation, solidarity and common good, hereby advises and encourages all **eligible citizens** to exercise their democratic right to, **‘select capable individuals from all the people—men and women who fear God, trustworthy men and women who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens.’** (Exodus 18:21). Prayer and reflection upon the Sacred Scriptures is very important as we make decisions about candidates and issues on the ballot.

CCJPZ, having observed the pre-By-elections developments, processes and activities relating to the elections and the environment, congratulates the nation of Zimbabwe, all political parties and contesting candidates for a relatively peaceful campaign period. It is critical to mention that as a Church, represented through our structures dotted across the vacant constituencies and local authority wards, we have witnessed some incidences of both intra and inter party political violence across the country, resulting in injuries and death, which is regrettable. We as a Church, condemn political violence in all its forms. The Church would like to reiterate that political violence is not an alternative to political contestation but rather peace, non-violent participation and respect for human dignity are the key cornerstones of any political contestation.

Our observation of media coverage on all contesting candidates was fair although we strongly feel all political parties should have equal coverage and access to both public and private media. As Church we want to state that our media is highly polarized, such that one candidate from a certain political party is reported in the positive way while the other receive negative publicity. The Church calls for media objectivity in reporting when covering all political parties. As the

Church, we believe that media should strive to afford all contesting political parties equal access to both private and public media by providing a platform for the political parties and candidates to communicate their message to the electorate, affording political parties candidates to debate with each other.

As the nation prepares to vote, we encourage people to vote peacefully. We urge all contesting political parties to restrain their supporters from engaging in political violence. We call on Political Parties and their leaders to act in a manner consistent with the peace we have experienced so far and not withstanding any election challenges, to do everything in their power to honor their pre-election pledges and abide by election outcomes. Where there are legitimate and substantiated irregularities and anomalies, we urge concerned parties to resolve these through peaceful dialogue, law abiding and in an orderly manner. There have been concerns around the conflicting statements issued by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) on the voters roll, which the Church feels, must be carefully handled as this may cause citizens to lose confidence in the Election Management Body. We therefore urge ZEC, to respond to and take the necessary steps and recommendations to address and resolve these issues.

The Catholic Church will compile a report, at the end of the By-Elections as usual, based on our observation of the electoral processes. This report will inform our Church's, position for dialoguing with relevant stakeholders to enhance the electoral processes in Zimbabwe.

As I conclude this Pre-Election Statement, allow me to make some recommendations based on CCJPZ's observation of the Pre By-Election period;

- Citizens should participate in the electoral process without fear and exercise their constitutional rights.
- Civil societies observing the electoral process should produce true reports that reflect what actually happened.
- ZEC should safeguard the integrity, credibility and transparency of the By-Election electoral process.
- Security Services are encouraged to discharge their constitutional mandate diligently, particularly the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) which is entrusted with the responsibility to maintain law and order. They must encourage people to maintain peace during the electoral process. Perpetrators of political violence should be dealt with in accordance with the law without fear or favor.
- Political parties should desist from using violence as a way of expressing their dissatisfaction.
- Public and Private media should be objective and ensure all contesting parties have equal access and fair media coverage in the By-Elections.

The Church will continue to make itself available, as usual, to assist in peaceful resolution of issues pertaining to peace and national building efforts, in order to move our nation forward. We urge the nation to remain united in prayer, faith and hope and to maintain a spirit of restraint, tolerance and harmony. We pray that political maturity and tolerance will continue to be a part of our national dialogue and culture.

Let us all go and vote in Peace.

I thank you!

God Bless our nation Zimbabwe

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Right Rev. Bishop Rudolf Nyandoro (ZCBC-CCJPZ Bishop Chairman)