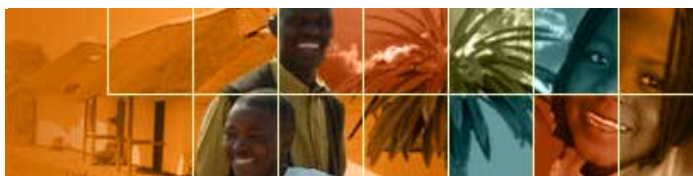


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By The Hon. Phumzile Mlambo Ngcuka On The Zimbabwe Parliamentary Elections Held on 31 March, 2005

Harare: Southern African Development Community Leader, Elections Observer Mission to Zimbabwe, Her Excellency, Minister Phumzile Mlambo Ngcuka on behalf of SADC today, 1st of April, 2005 extended SADC's congratulations to the people of Zimbabwe following the holding of a peaceful, credible and dignified election on March 31, 2005.

SADC commends voters for high levels of political tolerance and maturity displayed. This in SADC's view, bodes well for nurturing a culture that tolerates multipartyism, as an essential building block for democracy.

Since its arrival in Zimbabwe on the 15th March, 2005, two weeks ahead of the election as required by the SADC Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections, the SADC Elections Observer Mission (SOEM) consisted of South Africa as the Chair of the Organ of SADC on Politics, Defence and Security Co-operation, Mauritius, Zambia, Botswana, Namibia, United Republic of Tanzania, Malawi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique, Lesotho, Angola and the SADC Secretariat.

Fifty-five observers were deployed throughout the length and breadth of Zimbabwe in both rural and urban areas to observe the elections. These observers, in executing their mandate were guided by the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections. Field teams were deployed to Mashonaland West, Mashonaland East, Mashonaland Central, Bulawayo, Midlands, Matebeleland North, Matebeleland South, Masvingo, Manicaland and Harare from the 23rd March to 1st April 2005. The on-going work of the SADC Ambassadors accredited in Harare laid the foundation for the election

observer mission. The Mission traveled extensively in the rural and urban areas covering 90% of the total national constituencies and attended over 2000 meetings and political rallies organized by political parties and independent candidates. The leader of the Mission traveled to all corners of the country by road and by air visiting rural areas such as Mutoko in Mashonaland East, Shamva in Mashonaland Central, Odzi in Manicaland, Great Zimbabwe in Masvingo and Gwanda in Matebeleland South.

With regard to the polling process, it is SADC's overall view that the elections were conducted in an open, transparent and professional manner. The polling stations opened and closed at the appointed times and were impressed by the orderliness and patience of voters, who we believe, were able to express their franchise peacefully, freely and unhindered. The picture that emerged at the close of poll was an election day, which was peaceful. This confirmed the determination of the people of Zimbabwe to do their best to implement the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections in the region.

It is SADC's greatest hope that the spirit of co-operation and political tolerance and responsible role of political parties, which prevailed thus far, will continue to thrive amongst all parties and role players in the post election phase as part of nation building and reconciliation.

As counting continues in various polling stations, SADC is convinced that all those concerned with the process, will continue to discharge their responsibilities, thus ensuring that the post election day process is as transparent as that which observed on poll day.

After the announcement of the election results, SADC will issue a statement that will speak of its mandate in accordance with its own Guidelines and Principles Governing Democratic Elections as adopted by the Summit of Heads of States in August, 2004 in Grand Baie, Mauritius.

Notwithstanding these initial observations, the SADC Elections Observer Mission is however concerned with the number of people who were turned away from polling stations. It is still not clear to us exactly how many people were affected in this way as well as the reason for them not being able to cast their vote. It is also the Mission's view that, although there were efforts to ensure equitable access to the public media, there is still considerable room to improve in this area to allow the access to the state media by the opposition. There were also concerns expressed by the opposition regarding the indelible ink and it is right that these should be examined by the relevant electoral authorities. Furthermore, there were allegations by a number of stakeholders of the use of food as an electoral tool, which we were unable to confirm.

The representation and the overall role of women in the


election machinery has to be noted and commended.

SADC reiterates its commitment to being neutral and impartial in the conduct of its duties and will continue to support the people of Zimbabwe in their reconstruction efforts.

Issued by the SADC Elections Observer Mission Leader, Her Excellency Minister Phumzile Mlambo Ngcuka.

1st April, 2005



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