



THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

A COMMUNION OF CHURCHES – EINE KIRCHENGEMEINSCHAFT – UNA COMUNIÓN DE IGLESIAS – UNE COMMUNION D'ÉGLISES
LUTHERISCHER WELTBUND – FEDERACIÓN LUTERANA MUNDIAL – FÉDÉRATION LUTHÉRIENNE MONDIALE

Office of the General Secretary

Statement from LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko on the delayed election results in Zimbabwe

The Lutheran World Federation is following the developments in Zimbabwe with great and growing concern. The significance of the opportunity that the recent parliamentary and presidential elections represent for Zimbabwe cannot be overstated. It is an opportunity for the government to hear the voice of the citizens, and an opportunity for the people of Zimbabwe to exercise their rights as citizens. Zimbabweans long waited for this day, and they went to the polls, standing in queues for hours, in order to lodge their vote. But the current situation, in which the release of the full election results has been unconscionably delayed, does not correspond to the legitimate expectations of the citizens of Zimbabwe. The unacceptable vacuum of information concerning the election outcome only encourages speculation and suspicion. The longer the delay, the greater the potential for unrest.

The LWF calls on the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission and the authorities in Zimbabwe to release the election results without further delay, in order to allay growing tensions and suspicions. In the meantime, the LWF joins the calls issued by the churches of Zimbabwe for the government, opposition, security forces and all elements of society in Zimbabwe to exercise maximum restraint and calm, pending the release of the official results of the elections.

The LWF is particularly concerned about reports of intimidation and violence against opposition representatives and supporters, against media representatives and against specific groups within Zimbabwean society. The LWF notes that the reports received attribute the intimidation and violence both to official security forces and to groups of 'war veterans'. The government of Zimbabwe has a responsibility to ensure the safety and security of all Zimbabweans, and must act to prevent political violence and intimidation by whomsoever committed.

By failing to act affirmatively for the release of the election results, the government and the ruling party are responsible for the lack of information and the accompanying tensions and suspicions. The result is a deepening lack of trust in President Mugabe and his government. And if the government of Zimbabwe has lost the respect of its own citizens, what other member of the international community should respect it? But the wider and longer-term effects on the nation are even more troubling than the immediate political crisis. The people of Zimbabwe have not only lost trust in the current government, but in the very structures and institutions of governance in the country, damaging the fabric of the nation itself. The wider consequences of this worsening disconnect between society and authority in Zimbabwe are reflected in a whole range of social ills and the breakdown of many fundamental social



structures and institutions. This is tragically evident in the millions of Zimbabweans taking the dangerous course of crossing borders, sometimes through crocodile-infested rivers, to neighboring countries. The hospitality provided by Zimbabwe's neighbors is a powerful demonstration of solidarity with the victims of misrule in Zimbabwe, but stretches their own limited resources and is a source of instability in the region as a whole.

The people of Zimbabwe have suffered greatly in recent years. The potential that Zimbabwe once demonstrated as a leader in education, health and food production, as well as in the political liberation of the peoples of Africa, has been all but destroyed and forgotten. Amidst a growing sense of intimidation and fear in the country, Zimbabweans have been suffering humiliation and deprivation not at the hands of external oppressors, but at the hands of their own government. The unrest and possible violence that might yet emerge from a delayed election outcome can only serve to deepen the humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe. I pray that the people of Zimbabwe will be spared this further agony, and that the outcome of this election, rather than creating new divisions, will be the beginning of healing, restoration and reconciliation in this wounded land.

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