

Heads of SADC Electoral Commissions discuss ways to improve electoral quality in the region

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Addis Ababa, 22 November 2007 (ECA) – Heads of the Electoral Commissions of the SADC countries, representatives of the SADC Secretariat and the Pan African Parliament, and other stakeholders and experts will meet in Lusaka, Zambia from 28 –29 November to evaluate elections and the electoral systems, and to map a way forward in order to improve the quality of elections in the region.

The Workshop under the theme “ *Improving Electoral Quality in the Southern African Region* ” is convened jointly by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa-Southern Africa Office (UNECA-SA), the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) and the Electoral Institute of Southern Africa (EISA).

The purpose of the Workshop is to add value to the democratization process in the sub-region by evaluating elections and the electoral systems and then map a way forward in order to improve the quality of elections. It is acknowledged that many countries in the SADC have some of the best electoral laws and electoral codes of conduct in the continent. However, at issue is whether these blueprints are being adhered to around election time. Accordingly, the Workshop will take stock of the manner in which elections are conducted in the region against the backdrop of these laws and codes. Topics of discussion will therefore range from electoral processes and design issues to the cost of elections.

Commendably, since the 1990s the SADC region has enjoyed multiparty democracy and the leadership have committed itself to good governance, human rights and to engender developmental democracy. Furthermore, more people than ever before, including the rural and urban poor, women, the youth, and minority groups, have been going to the polls to express their right to vote.

The ultimate objective of efficiently- and effectively-run elections however is the promise of a “ *democratic dividend* ” in the form of good governance and development. In this regard, several questions have to be raised. Do elections in fact given the citizenry a voice in democracy? Is there adequate transparency and accountability content in our electoral systems to guarantee increased public trust and confidence that is necessary for democracy consolidation? Finally, do our elections imbue the citizens with confidence about improved material conditions and a brighter future?

Background Note:

IDEA is an intergovernmental organization, which supports sustainable democracy worldwide; EISA is a non-profit company that focuses on elections, electoral practices and the promotion of democratic governance; and ECA-SA is a sub-regional office of the ECA whose headquarters are located in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

This Workshop is a response from UNECA Member States for specialist organizations to provide a forum in which SADC countries can share views on best electoral practices, and identify areas of cooperation and mutual assistance.

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