



Alert 4: Violation of the period of silence

The twenty-four hours before polling day is a period of reflection in Zimbabwe that is highlighted in the Fourth Schedule of the Electoral Act under paragraph seven which details the conduct of political parties and candidates on polling day. It states that,

No political party or candidate may, from midnight twenty-four hours before polling day in any election or referendum until polling stations are closed on that day—

- (a) Convene or hold a public gathering of any kind;*
- (b) Publish, or cause or permit the publication, of any advertisement or statement promoting or opposing a particular party or candidate;*

These provisions have largely been ignored by two presidential candidates, Emmerson Mnangagwa and Nelson Chamisa. The party leaders, made statements on ZTV and Facebook respectively. Their statements violated the above provisions.

Emmerson Mnangagwa made an ‘Address to the Nation’ that was featured several times on ZTV urging Zimbabweans to observe peace during the elections. He also took the opportunity to remind the viewers and observers how peaceful the country has been under his presidency. He says, *“the events of November gave us a chance to dream again. The past seven months has seen civil and political rights flourish”*. While this address was made under the guise of the President of Zimbabwe, this comes on the eve of the election and gives unnecessary airplay to the President to indirectly campaign, the night before the election on the 30th.

President Mnangagwa went on to make an address on Facebook, featured on ZTV’s news at 8 on the 29th where he said:

“Now that it is clear to all, that Chamisa has forged a deal with Mugabe, we can no longer believe that his intentions are to transform Zimbabwe and rebuild our nation. The choice is clear, you either vote for Mugabe under the guise of Chamisa or you vote for a new Zimbabwe under my leadership and ZANU PF. Real change is coming, we should all be part of it. God bless Zimbabwe”

Nelson Chamisa also violated the period of silence by holding a press conference which was streamed live on Facebook. His legal advisor, Advocate Thabani Mpfu reiterated that the presser was, “not a political event” and added that, “this is not a campaign, this is the perfection of the final stretch in the execution of the anti-rigging mechanism”. Even though the press briefing was centred on highlighting the party’s

concerns ahead of Election Day it was held in front of a banner that said "Vote Nelson Chamisa for President". Both Mpofo and Chamisa allude to electoral violations with Chamisa noting that he was aware that,

"ZANU PF hired foreigners who are fake news mercenaries, their duty is to concoct, manufacture, engineer and produce fictitious and fallacious video, news stories and then send them out to you to send them out to the world to confuse the voter, to cause despondency, alarm and also dissatisfaction".

Chamisa then talked about his campaign in the, question and answer section when he told journalists that his government would not only "Look East" in terms of foreign policy but it would "look everywhere".

ZEC acting Chief Elections Officer Utoile Silaigwana was quoted on ZBC indicating that ZEC had reported MDC Alliance president Nelson Chamisa to the police for conducting an illegal press conference. It is not yet clear if ZEC has reported ZANU PF Presidential candidate Emmerson Mnangagwa to the police for a similar breach.

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