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PRESS STATEMENT

With the country's harmonized presidential, parliamentary and local government elections just three weeks to go on 29 March 2008, Zimbabwe's electoral authorities, the political parties, candidates and the voting public are all in a heightened state of campaigning and anticipation. It is indeed time when the people's elected representatives and others aspiring for public office go directly to the people for a new or fresh mandate, whatever the case may be. And as I have said before, we should all listen and respect the voices of the people of Zimbabwe when they freely speak through the ballot on 29 March, 2008, as they have done in the past since the dawn of freedom in 1980.

Zimbabwe has a known and proud tradition of transparent, peaceful, free and fair elections. Of course those among our well-known detractors and the media have unashamedly chosen to look the other way and trumpet British falsehoods. It is therefore disheartening but not surprising that certain sections of the media, unfortunately including the South African Broadcasting Corporation, among others, have chosen to ignore the facts obtaining on the ground. We are now too familiar that whatever good and positive happens in Zimbabwe can never pass as news worthy as long as such stories do

not fit into the well-known and publicly acknowledged broad agenda of "regime change".

Recent days have witnessed a virulent and vicious smear campaign against Zimbabwe by the West and sections of the South African media and their surrogates within the country. This sustained and well-orchestrated media blitz has recently been focused on the observation of the forthcoming harmonized elections by outsiders. Criticism is healthy and welcome when it is constructive. However, much of the recent criticism is certainly not out of ignorance of the facts, but out of sheer malice.

Over the years, Zimbabwe has adopted the custom of inviting International Observers to witness its electoral processes. In accordance with this tradition, the government of Zimbabwe has extended invitations to several countries and organizations to observe the forthcoming harmonized elections. This was done in compliance with Section 124(15) (c) of the Electoral Act [Chapter 2:13] which empowers the Minister of Foreign Affairs to invite foreign observers to witness our elections while the Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs invites local observers. As a result, both local and foreign observers have been invited.

Foreign invitees were selected on the basis of reciprocity as well as their objectivity and impartiality in their relationship with Zimbabwe. Our list of invitees excludes those countries with pre-conceived ideas who believe that the only free and fair election is where the opposition wins. We do not believe that inviting such countries or organizations serves any real purpose where impartial observation is expected and required. These countries and organizations have already written their reports, and we have no desire as a government to consort with such elements nor give such cooked reports the credence and credibility they obviously lack and do not deserve.

It is also within our long-standing tradition to accredit diplomats accredited to Zimbabwe to observe our elections. In that regard, only those diplomats who are accredited on a full term basis, and not those on temporary assignments, and wish to observe our elections,

Community of Portuguese Speaking (Lusophone) Countries (CPLP)
Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD)

A number of African countries, including all SADC members, as well as European and South American countries have been invited. In Europe will be granted accreditation upon their request to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Diplomats accredited to Zimbabwe, but are resident in South Africa and other countries, will also be accredited according to the same procedure. All are welcome. As a matter of fact, the accreditation of all foreign observers is already taking place in Harare and Bulawayo and will run up to 28 March 2008.

The point also needs to be made that our electoral reforms are in line with the SADC Principles and Guidelines that Govern Democratic Elections. Zimbabwe has already enshrined the SADC Principles and Guidelines into its domestic legislation to ensure that the electoral process conforms to the highest standards. We have heard very strange noises from Western sources that the SADC Principles and Guidelines are an imposition on Zimbabwe or that they were developed only for Zimbabwe. This notion is quite clearly mischievous, patently false and can only be peddled by our detractors whose agenda we all know. For the record, Zimbabwe was a leading co-author of the SADC Principles and Guidelines which we crafted for our region as a collective. In fact Zimbabwe is so far the only country in SADC that has made the SADC Principles and Guidelines part and parcel of its electoral laws.

Again for the record, Zimbabwe has invited countries and organizations from all parts of the world. International and regional organizations invited include:

African Union Commission (AU)
Southern Africa Development Community (SADC)
Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)
Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)
Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS)
Africa, Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP)
Pan African Parliament (PAP)
Caribbean Community (CARICOM)
Economic Community for Central African States (ECCAS)
East African Community (EAC)
Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN)
MAGHREB Union