



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **WAEON Condemns Arrest of Citizen Observer Groups (Election Resource Centre and Zimbabwe Election Support Network) during Zimbabwe's General Elections**

The attention of the West Africa Election Observers Network (WAEON) has been drawn to the fact that around 11 PM on election day on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2023 in Zimbabwe, the Election Resource Center (ERC) and the Zimbabwe Election Support Networks (ZESN)'s joint data center at Grange Road in Harare was raided by individuals from the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) and the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of Zimbabwe. Subsequently, the ZESN's data center at the Holiday Inn was also raided by the CIO and CID. The CIO and CID officials have further raided the homes of some individuals from ZESN's management and leadership. So far, a total of 30 to 40 individuals have been arrested at the two mentioned locations. It is believed that they are currently being held by the CID in central Harare. As a result of these actions, ERC and ZESN have suspended their citizen observation efforts meant to independently assess the integrity of the polls and secure the voting rights of Zimbabweans. The safety of the ERC and ZESN's respective chairpersons is not currently known. Efforts to contact them in the last hours have not been successful.

WAEON, condemns these acts of abuse of power, unconstitutionality and impunity by the CIO and the CID) of Zimbabwe taken against our sister network member in Zimbabwe. It must be noted that ERC and ZESN are reputable citizen observer organizations with years of experience in observing elections and have been duly accredited by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) to observe the August 2023 harmonized elections. The activities at these data centers were entirely legal and involved receiving observation reports from accredited ERC and ZESN observers. Since ZESN is a member of the Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors (GNDEM), it observes elections in accordance with the standards set forth in the Declaration of Global Principles for Nonpartisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations, which essentially recognizes the right of citizens to monitor their own elections and firmly guaranteed by domestic and international law.

Therefore, WAEON calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all persons arrested for doing their civic duty. It calls on the government of Zimbabwe to respect its constitution and international obligations. We want to remind the Government of Zimbabwe that the UN

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Special Rapporteurs on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Associations and on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders acknowledges election observers as human rights defenders and demands UN member countries take measures to ensure their safety and not obstruct their work. Further, WAEON calls on all human rights defenders and citizens of Zimbabwe as well as the international community to condemn these actions and demand the immediate release of those arrested.

This act of subverting the will of Zimbabweans' to choose their leaders follows a number of acts of impunity by incumbent governments standing elections on the African continent including recent elections in Sierra Leone where the National Election Watch (NEW) leadership received death threats for doing their job and were forced to leave their countries for safety. These actions only erode the commitment to democracy amongst young people across the continent. In West Africa, these conditions have led to coup details in some cases. If election integrity global stakeholders do not stand up to defend and protect the rights of citizen observers Africa's current democracy free fall will get worse reducing further the prospects for peace and prosperity.

Please join WAEON in demanding the release of ZESN and ERC citizen observers on Twitter @WAEON under the hashtag **#FreeZimbabweElectionObservers**.

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### **About WAEON**

The West Africa Election Observers Network (WAEON) is a non-profit organization that is impartial, non-partisan, and non-religious and whose mission is to promote and improve Citizens' Election Observation Groups (CEOGs) throughout the West African sub-region. According to the Declaration of Global Principles for Nonpartisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations, WAEON is made up of independent and nonpartisan CEOGs throughout West Africa. Since its founding in 2010, the network has worked to support member organizations morally and technically as they perform impartial citizen election observation, advocate for electoral reform, and support legitimate elections in their home nations.

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