



ZIMBABWE'S BISHOPS CONFERENCE WARNS AGAINST VIOLENCE DURING ELECTIONS

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The Catholic Bishops Conference of Zimbabwe (ZCBC) have called on the citizens of the country to justly exercise their voting rights in the country's forthcoming 2018 General Elections; urging them to eschew all forms of violence and reject coercion.

The Bishops' admonition was contained in a Pastoral Letter, recently addressed to the Catholic faithful of the country. The Pastoral Letter titled: ***Elections, Peace and Development*** and signed by all the Bishops of the country noted that: "Violence and coercion only serve to discredit our elections. Any use of force takes away credibility and integrity of the election. People must be able to make free choices according to their own judgment.

The Bishops specifically appealed to the government of President Robert Mugabe to ensure that citizens enjoy their political rights and freedom of expression. They urged political parties, the government and individuals to strictly adhere to and respect the constitution of Zimbabwe which was overwhelmingly approved by a referendum vote of

May 2013.

The Bishops' Pastoral Letter is aimed at preparing and steering the nation away from a repeat of the 2008 political and election crisis. Zimbabwe's 2008 pre and post-election landscape was very volatile and characterized by wide scale violence most of which was blamed on state institutions and agents. With this pastoral letter, the Catholic Bishops' want Zimbabweans to respect the constitution and behave peacefully before, during and after the 2018 general elections.

They declared "As we prepare for 2018, let us respect each other and even mirror in our words and actions the love of God, Father of us all." The Bishops added, "we now have our own Constitution, a great achievement, and it says in one place, "The State and every person, including the juristic persons, and every institution and agency of government at every level, must promote national unity, peace and stability."