

Zimbabwe poll not free and fair: African observers

A team of African observers to Zimbabwe's controversial presidential run-off election said the 'state-sponsored' intimidation, violence and loss of life before the vote marked the 'lowest ebb in recent history in Zimbabwe.'

Delivering its report on Friday's elections, the head of the 40-strong Pan-African Parliament (PAP) observer team, Marwick Khumalo, said: 'The mission concludes that the current atmosphere prevailing in the country did not give rise to the conduct of free, fair and credible elections.'

The PAP team said the election campaign was marked by 'high levels of intimidation, violence, displacement of people, abductions and loss of life,' for which it held Zimbabwe's leadership responsible.

It urged the leaders of the 14-nation Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union (AU) to engage Zimbabwe's political leaders into a negotiated transitional settlement.

The AU Sunday came under increased pressure to take a tough line with Mugabe.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu called on the 53-state body, whose leaders are scheduled to meet in Egypt Monday, to refuse to recognize the outcome of Friday's controversial presidential run-off vote.

'If you were to have a unanimous voice saying quite clearly to Mr Mugabe 'you are unwelcome, you are illegitimate and we will not recognise your administration in any shape or form', I think that would be a very powerful signal and would strengthen the hand of the international community,' Tutu said in a BBC interview.

Opposition Movement for Democratic Change leader Morgan Tsvangirai, who boycotted the June 27 run-off election over state-sponsored violence against his supporters, has called on the AU to send peacekeepers to Zimbabwe and to appoint a special envoy to the Zimbabwean crisis.

The Zimbabwe Election Commission is expected to announce Sunday that Mugabe has overturned his defeat in the first round of voting for president in March that Tsvangirai won but in which he fell short of an outright majority.

Mugabe, who has ruled Zimbabwe for all of its 28 years of independence from Britain, is expected to be sworn in quickly before travelling to the AU summit meeting in the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheikh.

So far the AU has abstained from condemning Friday's vote.

US President George W Bush said Saturday his administration would be pushing for United Nations sanctions against Zimbabwe, including an arms embargo and a travel ban on certain officials.

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