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### ERC steps up elections campaign monitoring

The Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) in an effort to ensure a safe national environment that is free from fear and intimidation, for the August 28 Regional and General Elections, has stepped up its elections campaign monitoring exercise.

Monitors are being deployed to cover all political meetings across the country and will be moving around the Administrative Regions to get a sense of the mood of the people.

Since the commencement of the exercise, the ERC has monitored a number of meetings and reports are being compiled. These reports will be shared with the public.

The Commission is urging all political activists to avoid issuing statements which could excite ethnic or racial animosity.

Under Article 212 D (c) of the Constitution, the ERC has been mandated to “Discourage and prohibit persons, institutions, political parties and associations from indulging in, advocating or promoting discrimination or discriminatory practices on the ground of ethnicity.

The Commission also wishes to advise that it is an offence for a person who makes or publishes or causes to be made or published any statement; or takes any action, which results or can result in racial or ethnic violence or hatred among the people. (section 139 D (1) of the Representation of the People (Amendment) Act, Act 1 of 2001).

Such a person can be liable on conviction to a fine of one hundred thousand dollars together with imprisonment for two years.

It is to be further noted that such a person if convicted may be incapable during a period of five years of being a member of the National Assembly, a local democratic organ or the holder of a constitutional or statutory office.

By section 139 E (1) of the Representation of the People (Amendment) Act, Act 1 of 2001, where there is a written complaint to the Ethnic Relations Commission that any political party has made or published or cause to be made or published any statement; or has taken any action, which results or can result in racial or ethnic violence or hatred, the Leader or General Secretary of the political party shall be summoned by the Ethnic Relations Commission to participate in investigations of the matter by the Ethnic Relations Commission as the Commission deems fit, provided that such investigations be

conducted in a manner open to the public. If the political party is deemed culpable that party will be fined \$500,000.

According to the Racial Hostility Act, it is an offence for a person who willfully excites or attempts to excite hostility or ill will against any section of the public or against any person on the grounds of their or his race (section 2 (1)). A person found guilty of this offence may be liable to a fine of \$500,000 and to seven years imprisonment.

At the recent conversations involving women, youth and religious leaders, these sector groups noted that apart from political leaders, citizens have a critical role to play in ensuring the elections period is free from fear.

In their recommendations, the groups called on all stakeholders to work towards building peace and harmony especially during this period.

The public is reminded that the ERC's hotline numbers for reporting incidents are 225-7151, 225-7154 and 225-7087.

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