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IBPP Research Associates: Zimbabwe

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---As people reflect on rejection of draft constitution: Observers call for dialogue to map out way forward---

As Zimbabweans reflect on the rejection of the Constitutional Commission's proposed new constitution, observers are calling for dialogue to map the way forward. Former Liberian president Professor Amos Sawyer, leading a nine-member observer mission on the plebiscite, said no one among those who were involved in the constitution making process should claim victory. He said now that the referendum was over, it is time to revisit the exercise and use the opportunity for a "positive re-engagement which is critical not only for Zimbabwe, but for Africa as a whole and the wider international community". "Stakeholders should now step back, reflect and re-engage ...going back is not the way forward but gloating is neither the way forward," he said. Prof Sawyer was leading an observer team from the Centre for Democracy and Development, a non-governmental organisation involved in research, information training, democracy and peace building in West Africa.

President Mugabe called on Zimbabweans to work together and plan for the future. "Let us all winners and losers accept the referendum verdict and start planning our way forward," he said. Hours after the announcement of the results, he said the Government accepts the results of the referendum, removing fears that the wishes of the people might be ignored.

Under the Referendum Act, the President is not obliged to respect the out-come of the vote but President Mugabe, who had already pledged to respect the views of people, said the Government accepted the results. "Government accepts the result and respects the will of the people as expressed through the results," he said in an address to the nation on Tuesday night.

The vice-chairperson of the National Constitutional Assembly, Mr Lovemore Madhuku, said political parties, civic organisations, churches and trade unions should now convene a conference to discuss the next step. "This meeting will decide the way forward and whether we should have an elected constitutional assembly or an appointed one. "However, our next course of action will de-pend on how the Government reacts to our proposals," said Mr Madhuku.

The NCA, a coalition of civic organisations, political parties and churches, was campaigning for a "no" vote arguing that the draft constitution gave the president too much executive powers and failed to interpret the wishes of the people. Some commentators, however, said people should not drown themselves in delight or despair but find ways of going ahead and bring about a constitution which allow for good governance in the country. "We urge all stakeholders, regardless of the out-come of the referendum not to adopt the attitude of 'winner takes all'. "Through their vote, the people of Zimbabwe have challenged their leaders to build a national consensus and to establish an appropriate mechanism for constructive dialogue as to the way forward," said Prof Sawyer. The president of the United Parties Bishop Abel Muzorewa agreed with Prof Sawyer saying dialogue has always been a good approach.

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Analysts also urged the media, which played a crucial role in informing people about the constitution making process, to be responsible in reporting the post referendum era as fanning hatred might lead to conflicts. 'The media had a major contribution, in many ways, to the process and the post referendum phase is of even more importance. The media has to advise itself on the role it plays,' said Prof Sawyer.

Some of the main highlights of the Constitutional Commission draft were limited terms for the president, creation of a prime minister's post to run the affairs of Government and the re-introduction of a two chamber Parliament, consisting of a Senate and National Assembly. Other proposals were the sharing of executive powers between the president, prime minister and cabinet in consultation with Parliament and the right for Government not to pay compensation for land acquired for resettlement. [Interestingly, the Western media have played up the opinion that the draft was to greatly increase the power of the President and that the draft was defeated primarily via dissatisfaction at Zimbabwe's microeconomic condition.]

The Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries has commended Zimbabweans for voting peacefully during the just-ended referendum on the draft constitution, saying their conduct inspired confidence among investors and the business community. In a statement yesterday, the president of CZI, Mr. Kumbirayi Katsande, also paid tribute to the police for stamping out incidents of political violence which had surfaced in the run-up to the plebiscite. "It is very encouraging for the business community and for investors that we can show this level of maturity in our young democracy," he said. He added that President Mugabe's statement, delivered in an address to the nation after the announcement of the poll results, was important in underlining "our commitment to democratic principles of tolerating differing opinions and accepting the will of the majority of those who vote". President Mugabe said the Government accepted the result of the referendum and will respect the will of the people.

Zimbabweans rejected the draft constitution drawn up by the Constitutional Commission in a peaceful referendum held over the weekend. Mr Katsande said the business community expected the same conduct in the forth-coming parliamentary elections. "Whilst it is the people themselves who must jealously guard the good behaviour shown at the February 12-13 referendum, we also salute the law enforcement authorities for being resolute and without fear or favour stamping out the initial incidents of politically motivated violence."(Keywords: Constitution, Mugabe, Zimbabwe.)