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SADC GRAVELY CONCERNED AT DRC'S WORSENING POLITICAL SITUATION

Lusaka, (Friday, 14th December, 2018)-- His Excellency Mr Edgar Chagwa Lungu, President of the Republic of Zambia says the Southern African Development Community (SADC) is gravely concerned at the deteriorating political situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and has therefore called upon the government to establish conditions for a free and fair election ahead of the December 23 polls.

After a series of consultations with other Heads of State over the past two days, President Lungu, in his capacity as Chair of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation, says SADC is gravely concerned at the prevailing precarious political and security situation in the DRC ahead of the Presidential and Parliamentary Elections scheduled for 23rd December, 2018.

"I wish to express my unwavering solidarity on behalf of the Government and people of the Republic of Zambia, with the Government and the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo, and therefore call upon all stakeholders to work together and exercise tolerance," President Lungu says.

The President states that for the DRC to hold peaceful, inclusive, transparent and successful elections, the government must ensure that all citizens are safe, all candidates are allowed free space to campaign, and that election materials are secure and accessible to all registered voters.

"Your Excellency, it is with great sadness that I learnt of the death and injuries of nationals of the Democratic Republic of Congo due to some violence in Lubumbashi, Mbuji-Mayi and Kalemie. The blatant destruction of electoral materials at a warehouse in Kinshasa, which gravely hinders efforts made by the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), is of grave concern," President Lungu said in a letter to President Joseph Kabila today.

The Southern Development Community (SADC) expresses solidarity with the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo in their endeavour to hold Presidential, Legislative and Provincial Elections on the 23rd of December 2018 and remain confident that a chance exists for the government to forestall an escalation in violence that claimed lives this week.

SADC notes the concerted efforts made by the Independent National Electoral Commission to prepare the logistics for holding successful elections within the mandated time frames but is gravely concerned at the destruction of electoral materials after the occurrence of a fire on 13th December 2018 at one of the central warehouses of CENI in Kinshasa.



"SADC is further concerned about the loss of life and destruction of property in the recent incidents of violence in Kalemie, Lubumbashi and Mbuji-Mayi.

SADC therefore calls on all political players to uphold the freedom of expression, assembly and unhindered campaigning, which are the hallmarks of the democratic exercise of the will of the people during this period.

SADC, in line with its revised Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections, strongly urges all stakeholders, particularly leaders of political parties, civil society, media and law enforcement authorities, to continue promoting a culture of tolerance and restraint and ensure that the 23rd December elections are not only successful but also peaceful and transparent.

SADC wishes to further emphasize that the forthcoming elections represent a major milestone in the history of the DRC and are instrumental in establishing sustainable peace and political stability.

SADC further wishes to inform all stakeholders that the SADC Electoral Observation Mission (SEOM) will continue to closely follow the electoral process and will report its observations to the relevant SADC political Organ in line with the revised SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections (2015).

"The elections are an essential requirement and important mechanism for peace, security and stability in DRC. Zambia therefore, calls on the various stakeholders to amicably resolve the prevailing political challenges and ensure that peace and stability are immediately restored," President Lungu says.

Zambia values the Democratic Republic of Congo as a dear sister and strategic partner and will continue to support the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo in efforts aimed at ensuring that peace and stability prevails in the DRC.

President spent most his day speaking to the presidents of Namibia, Angola, South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Botswana to push for efforts aimed promoting a credible electoral process ahead of the DRC crucial poll.

Issued by:

AMOS CHANDA
SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT
(PRESS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS)
STATE HOUSE



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