



CENTRE FOR MONITORING ELECTION VIOLENCE

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CMEV Statement on Gazetted COVID-19 Elections Regulations

July 19, 2020 – The Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) welcomes the Ministry of Health and Indigenous Medical Services finally gazetting the COVID-19 Elections Regulations on July 17, 2020. This comes 38 days after the ‘Health Guidelines for Conducting the Elections amidst the COVID-19 Outbreak’ (‘the original guidelines’) were first issued by the Ministry on June 09, 2020 and only 19 days before Election Day. Moreover, CMEV expresses its concern that a number of changes have been made to the original guidelines from when they were first published to them being gazetted as regulations. In particular:

- the maximum number of persons permitted to attend a meeting has been increased from 100 to 300, and 500 if the party leader is attending
- the maximum number of persons permitted to engage in door-to-door canvassing has been increased from 3 to 5
- numerous provisions in the original guidelines have been omitted from the gazetted regulations altogether, including provisions relating to: checking and bundling of ballot papers at District Returning offices (section 2.5 of the original guidelines); polling booths (2.9); conducting election in the quarantine centres (2.10); receiving ballot boxes at counting centres (2.11); counting centre etiquette (2.12); results tabulation centres (2.13); transport of staff and materials (2.14); special instructions for Police officers (3); disinfection (4); waste disposal (5); after the election (6). Also missing is the Health Administrative Structure outlined in section 7 to implement the guidelines.

CMEV is alarmed by these changes given that the COVID-19 pandemic situation in the country appears to be worsening. Relaxing physical campaigning restrictions is likely to expose more voters to COVID-19 through increased campaigning activities. Relaxing the restrictions on meeting attendance depending on the attendance of party leaders seems especially illogical.

Taking all this into consideration, CMEV requests the Minister of Health and Indigenous Medical Services and the Director-General of Health Services to:

- Gazette the remaining provisions in the originally published guidelines, and
- Provide an explanation to the voting public about why the originally published guidelines have been relaxed in this manner, and what steps they will take if the relaxed guidelines contribute to the pandemic situation becoming worse
- Work with healthcare workers, particularly PHIs, to resolve existing issues and to promote the regulations and educate the public

CMEV is fully committed to the election being held in a free, fair and safe manner, however, it insists that the government and health authorities have a responsibility to guarantee the health of all voters in the process, beyond short-term partisan electoral gains.