

MDC Step Up Election Fraud Claims

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Opposition report says it would have won the election if it hadn't been rigged.

Zimbabwe's opposition Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, has released a 56-page report outlining how it says President Robert Mugabe rigged recent parliamentary elections in favour of his own ZANU PF party.

The document, released on April 11 under the title "Stolen: How the elections were rigged", claims that without such manipulation, the MDC would have won the vote.

"The MDC did not lose the election on March 31," the party's legal affairs spokesman David Coltart told reporters in Johannesburg. "The people of Zimbabwe lost the right to elect a government of their choice."

Coltart said the election, in which ZANU PF secured 78 of 120 directly elected seats against the MDC's 41, was rigged in multiple ways.

"The results do not reflect the will of the Zimbabwean people," he said. "They reflect the will of the ruling party to have a two-thirds majority by whatever means necessary."

"In short, the entire electoral process and the election itself fundamentally violated the Southern African Development Community [SADC] principles," he added, in reference to a set of election guidelines set out by the fourteen heads of state of the SADC, the most powerful regional grouping, in the run-up to the vote.

The SADC leaders were acting in response to international criticism of Africa's reluctance to insist that Mugabe conduct the election fairly.

The report claims that in six of Zimbabwe's ten provinces nearly 134,000 people, most of them young people who mostly favour the MDC and comprising ten per cent of the electorate, were turned away from polling stations.

The MDC also alleges that there was widespread stuffing of ballot boxes between the closing of voting in polling stations and the announcement of results, after the Mugabe-controlled Zimbabwe Electoral Commission sampled votes and realized there was strong support for the opposition.

The document, which claims it was already obvious on the ground that Zimbabweans were ready for a new Zimbabwe and a new beginning, says the situation has now been "made worse by the brazen theft of the election".

"If our demands [to reverse election results in twenty or more constituencies] are not met immediately, we will continue our struggle," the MDC's information secretary Paul Themba-Nyathi replied, when asked if the party was considering Ukrainian Orange Revolution-style street protests in an attempt to end Mugabe's quarter century rule. "We will avail ourselves of all options available under Zimbabwe's constitution, as restrictive as they may be."

"The people are with us," he added. "We are going to mobilise on the ground, we are going to mobilise in the region."

An MDC spokesman told IWPR that the report was distributed in Johannesburg as well as Harare because issuing it in the Zimbabwean capital alone would have been a non-starter.

"It's unlikely the release would have attracted more than three journalists," he said, "the one remaining independent foreign newspaper correspondent and two local pro-Mugabe newspapers who are entirely hostile to us."

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