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COMMISSION APPEALS FOR CALM, VIGILANCE AS VOTING BEGINS

5 MAY 2019

Tshwane (National Results Operations Centre) – With the country’s 22 924 voting stations set to open over the next three days for special voting and Election Day, the Electoral Commission has appealed for a reduction in political activities to allow space for voting to take place peacefully.

At all times any hindrance or obstructions in the work of the Commission in the exercising of its duties is prohibited. The Electoral Act (73 of 1997) also specifically prohibits political meetings, marches, demonstrations or any other political event taking place on voting day. It also prohibits strikes and lockouts in the public transport and telecommunications sectors.

“While strictly speaking this applies only to Wednesday 8 May, voting will be taking place at voting stations and through home visits on Monday and Tuesday when we expect over 770 000 voters to cast their ballots,” explained Chief Electoral Officer Sy Mamabolo.

“The time for robust campaigning has ended. Now is the time for voting. Let’s give voters the time and space to consider their options and make their choices this week in an atmosphere of peaceful reflection.”

The Commission has urged communities not to engage in any civil unrest, protests or demonstrations which may impact on electoral operations.

“We have engaged with the security agencies including the South African Police Services to ensure that no disruptions to the elections are tolerated.”

The Commission also reminds employers that the right of citizens to vote is Constitutionally protected and paramount:

“The declaration of Election Day as a public holiday is to ensure every voter has the opportunity to exercise their right to vote and this takes priority over any business activities this week,” Mr Mamabolo said.

This is especially important for workers in the mining, agriculture, retail and tourism industries. “It is an offence to prevent access to voting stations by voters, political parties, election officials and observers,” he cautioned.

The Commission has also cautioned voters against disinformation and fake news reports designed to undermine the smooth election process after rumours surfaced this weekend that state pension payments would be delayed this week.

“The Commission has confirmed with the Minister for Social Development Ms Susan Shabangu that pension payments will be made as scheduled on Monday and Tuesday.”

The Commission warned voters not to be duped by disinformation including about voting hours. “Special voting takes place on Monday and Tuesday from 9am to 5pm, and voting on election day 8 May takes place from 7am to 9pm.”

The Electoral Commission has received a number of complaints of electoral misconduct. The allegations range from:

- minor improprieties such as the use of unsavoury epithets to blatant calls to violence;
- provocation and prankishness to outright acts of disinformation and the destruction of posters of opponents;
- offering inducements to vote for a party to threats against the rights of workers to vote;
- false statements to puerile name calling

“Rhetoric has often undermined reasonableness and rationality in the high-stakes contest for political power. Leaders of political parties, industry and civil society are reminded that our democracy is underpinned by our collective political maturity and

our adherence to and promotion of the laws in place to ensure free and fair elections,” the Commission said.

If proven, allegations of misconduct amount to serious violations of s 87(1)(a)(ii) of the Electoral Act 73 of 1998 and Item 9(1)(ii) the Code of Conduct in Schedule 2 to the Act. The consequences are dire for those found guilty of electoral offences. The penalty arising from a conviction for contravening

- a. s 87(1)(a)(ii) of the Electoral Act is a term of imprisonment not exceeding five years; and
- b. Item 9(1)(ii) the Code of Conduct is ten years.

Voters must take with them their green barcoded ID documents, a smartcard ID or a valid temporary ID certificate in order to vote. No other form of ID is accepted. The Department of Home Affairs has confirmed that its offices will be operational between 08h00 and 19h00 on the 6th and 7th May and between 07h00 and 21h00 on 8 May 2019 to assist voters to obtain temporary ID certificates and or collect their smartcard IDs.

Voters can check their voting station location by SMSing their ID number to 32810 (R1) or can reach the Contact Centre on 0800 11 8000 for all enquiries regarding the elections. The Contact Centre will operate extended hours this week from 8am to 7pm on Monday and Tuesday and from 7am to 9pm on Election Day.

ISSUED BY THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

Ensuring free and fair elections

For media queries please contact Kate Bapela on 082 600-6386

For media interviews with Electoral Commission officials please email requests to spokesperson@elections.org.za

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