



South Africa Prepares for Local Governmental Elections

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Credit downgrades, trade war and terrorist threats strain relations with Washington

A nationwide election for local offices in 278 municipalities across South Africa will take place on August 3.

South African officials recently announced the formation of an Inter-ministerial Committee (IMC) which is making preparations for the fourth of such elections since 1994 when the first non-racial vote was held on a national level bringing the African National Congress (ANC) to power.

The IMC is led by the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs Minister, Des van Rooyen, who is in charge of facilitating these tasks. The Committee is responsible for monitoring the efficient conducting of the elections and guaranteeing that all registered voters are able to fully participate in an atmosphere that is safe and impartial.

An Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) is responsible for providing information on the terms of the ballot and to ensure that the necessary materials are printed and distributed to various centers across the country. Candidates running on behalf of political parties and as individuals will be contesting for seats in councilor bodies and mayoral offices.

Baloyi says of the South African government: « We are now left with less than two months to ensure that we have free and fair 2016 local government elections. Whilst we are awaiting an important Constitutional Court decision on the clarification of the challenges relating to citizens and households without formal addresses. » (South African Government Statement, June 10)

More than 200 different political parties and nearly one thousand independent candidates will appear on the ballots in the coming municipal elections according to the (IEC). The IEC has already announced that the number of participants in the August poll represents an increase of 69 percent in comparison to the last of such elections in 2011.

A report from the Rand Daily Mail said “South Africa has seen a relatively steady growth in the number of political parties contesting municipal elections since 2000. In that year, there were a total of 79 political parties which contested the various municipalities. Six years later that number grew 23% to 97 — and it grew a further 25% between 2006 and 2011.” (June 8)

This same report continues noting “The 2016 Municipal Elections will see a record number of political parties contesting the eight metropolitan municipalities, 205 local municipalities and 44 district councils. A total of 204 political parties submitted candidate lists by last

week's deadline — almost 69% more than the 122 which contested in 2011. The Western Cape will have the highest number of parties contesting (77) followed by Limpopo (56), Gauteng (45) and the Eastern Cape (43). The smallest number of parties will contest in the Northern Cape (18).”

ANC Campaign Escalates

The ruling African National Congress (ANC) is facing challenges from the largest opposition party, the Democratic Alliance (DA), and the smaller Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF).



On June 4 the ruling party held a rally at the FNB Stadium in Soweto to launch its manifesto for the upcoming elections mobilizing tens of thousands of supporters.

ANC Women's League is calling upon the party to run at least 50 percent women candidates on August 3. A list of mayoral candidates will be released by June 17. (Eyewitness News, June 13)

Gauteng provincial African National Congress (ANC) Chairperson Paul Mashatile during the manifesto launch stressed to supporters to conduct peaceful campaigns, adhering to the IEC rules on avoiding violence. Mashatile said during his speech to the crowd that the concerns of youth would be high on the party agenda.

Mashatile also said he was confident that all Gauteng metropolitan areas would be taken by the ANC. The provincial leader pledged to those in attendance that the delivery of municipal services will be improved in the weeks and months to come.

There has been an upsurge in violence surrounding demonstrations over concerns involving municipal services. These actions have created a potentially volatile atmosphere which could impact the character and outcome of the elections.

Bloomberg reported on June 6 that “The lead-up to South Africa's local elections in August has turned increasingly violent as poor communities use the campaign as leverage to demand better living standards and politicians vie for control of the 278 municipalities. Communities staged 70 protests against a lack of decent housing, education and other services in the first four months of the year, up from 44 in the same period last year, according to Municipal IQ, which monitors the municipalities. Perceptions that the

authorities only respond to grievances when demonstrations turn violent is fueling the unrest, according to Kevin Allan, the research company's managing director."

In KwaZulu/Natal Province violent clashes occurred between supporters of the ANC and the rival EFF, headed by expelled ANC Youth League leader Julius Malema. Stones were thrown at Malema when he attempted to speak at a rally at Richards Bay, north of Durban, during May.

Police fired rubber bullets and teargas to disperse ANC and EFF supporters who fought at the location. EFF leaders said the ANC was attempting to prevent their organization from campaigning in KwaZulu-Natal — a charge the ruling party rejected.

Economic Crisis Continues

This election is taking place amid an economic decline inside the country exemplified through a recent credit evaluation by Standard & Poor designating the country just one level above junk bond status.

In a statement published on the ANC website on June 3, the party sought to place a positive spin on the recent S&P evaluation, stressing "The decision is a reward for the collective efforts of all South Africans doing everything to put South Africa first in placing our case before the rating agencies. The President and the Minister of Finance have been working with a number of CEOs and the labor movement in trying to turn the economy around and building confidence on the economy. This comes shortly after Moody's confirmed confidence in our economy."

Unemployment is rising throughout the country and the value of the national currency, the rand, slipped 0.2 percent during the first week of August.

Worsening Relations with Washington

This uncertainty was fueled over the last few days after the United States embassy issued a warning saying South Africa could be a target for an attack by the Islamic State. The ANC government refuted the security advisory saying there were no credible threats.

Relations between Washington and South Africa have been strained since late last year when the Obama administration temporarily suspended Pretoria from a preferential trade agreement based on the African Growth & Opportunity Act (AGOA). Earlier this year the ANC Secretary General accused the U.S. of plotting regime-change inside the country.

These sentiments have been shared as well with neighboring states where in the state-run Zimbabwe Herald newspaper on June 10, correspondent Christopher Farai Charamba wrote "one must be critical of these alerts. The South African government has labelled the information 'dubious and unsubstantiated.' Should this be the case then what motive would the U.S. have to issue this second alert?"

Charamba went on saying "In 2013 there were reports that the Botswana government, member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), had given the American military permission to start construction of facilities inside the Thebephatshwa air base in Gaborone. This was seen as the first step in plans to relocate the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) from Stuttgart, Germany to the Southern African country."

This same journalist emphasized that “Under the guise of the war on terror the USA has invaded countries, disposed governments, established military bases in a number of countries. With these new alerts in what is arguably one of the most peaceful regions in the world, SADC countries should be skeptical of U.S. intentions.”

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