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Interviewee: Priscilla Isaac

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JACKSON: This is Rachel Jackson. I'm here on the 31st of October with Priscilla Isaac, the Director of Elections for the Electoral Commission of Zambia in Lusaka. Ms. Isaac, thank you for being here with us.

ISAAC: *It is a pleasure Rachel.*

JACKSON: I was hoping first to hear a little more about your background and how you came to be at the Electoral Commission.

ISAAC: *Let me start by saying I think—I never thought that I would work for an institution like the Electoral Commission of Zambia because previously—first of all I did—my first degree was in psychology and public administration. When I graduated from the University of Zambia I joined the then Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines which was a parastatal mining organization, the largest in Zambia and was responsible for the production of our main source of income which is copper.*

I was in the public relations department for over ten years until a decision was made by the government to privatize the mining industry because of the challenges that government was having in financing the running of the mines. So to ensure sustainability it was decided to privatize the mines. But with privatization came downsizing some of the workforce. I was based in the public relations department at the head office here in Lusaka and I was responsible for covering activities at a small mine in Napundwe, a private mine. And also for covering Kabwe which is a small town about I think 150 k north of Lusaka and then of course covering activities at head office.

So I had a lot of interaction with different stakeholders, especially the media. So when the privatization was underway in 2000 and there was a lot of downsizing in head office. One of the departments that was affected was the public relations department. I was the only officer in Lusaka, because most of the PR stuff was in the Copperbelt where the mining activities were.

I left ZCCM in April 2000 but because we had been prepared over a number of years that the mines were going to be privatized, I think I started looking around for new opportunities, preparing myself to move on. And the previous year I had seen an advertisement for the position of public relations officer here at the Electoral Commission of Zambia. At that time they didn't have a public relations department, so whoever was going to join the institution was going to have to set up the department. So I did go through interviews and I had completely forgotten about the interviews and thought I probably hadn't been successful. About two months into my leaving ZCCM I got a letter of offer.

I came through because they wanted to know if I was still available for the position. So I came through to this office here, saw the then Acting Director who later became Director, Mr. Dan Kalale and confirmed that I was available for the job because I was now in between jobs. So I started working for the Electoral Commission in August 2000 and I was thrown into deep waters to set up the public relations department; which I managed to do so.

I must say it was very exciting and very challenging because now I was thrown into the media spotlight again. I had to interact with the media; and now I had to start learning how to interact with politicians, with civil society and of course the general citizenry. A year later in 2001 I was moved from the public relations

department and asked to head the Elections Department as Acting Deputy Director Elections and Voter Education.

It was a first for a woman in the Electoral Commission so it was very exciting and challenging. I remained in that position until my appointment as Director last year in April. This is my current position which again I must say is a very challenging one. You know it is different to be head of department but now to head an institution; and especially one which is as sensitive as this one; has its own challenges. But I am glad to say that I have had the support of the commission who are like the board of our institution, and my colleagues and subordinates and of course even the support of stakeholders from the different political parties, civil society. I think I have managed to have a good working relationship with them. That has helped me in the execution of my duties.

JACKSON: Thank you. So I was hoping we could talk about what the context was like that made the Electoral Commission decide to use the Conflict Management Committees. I understand they were implemented in 2006?

ISAAC: *Well, we actually started implementing the concept way back in 2001. In fact we started developing it in 2000 because—I think it was 2001 that we had the initial training workshops with EISA (Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa), [Elona Tip] was the chief trainer. Then we also had Georgina from the Malawi Electoral Commission who later on came to assist in the training. What made the Commission think of the establishment of Conflict Management committees was that we noticed that there was a rise in electoral disputes and conflicts especially during by-elections, not so much for the general elections because I must say elections in Zambia are generally peaceful. You get a lot of excitement during the campaign period but otherwise generally elections in Zambia are peaceful.*

And come Election Day, it is quiet. You may get a few pockets of skirmishes in some isolated incidents on poll day but very rarely. People tend to start getting excited again when the results start coming in especially when they're dealing with a presidential election and in a by-election when it is a parliamentary by-election. Local government elections tend to be quiet. For Zambia since 2001 we have been having our elections: presidential, national assembly and local government elections; on the same day. So it is quite a mammoth task.

It was because we noticed that there was some increase in electoral disputes during by-elections that we felt that let's see how it would work for people who were actually involved in these disputes to sit down and sort out these disputes among themselves.

What we were trying to avoid was a situation where it has to be a police issue all the time and you have people maybe remanded in custody and so forth. We thought that didn't really auger well during an election, it would give the impression that elections are really very contentious. Yet there are a lot of differences that people have that can be sorted out in an amicable manner without necessarily dragging one another to the police station.

Another challenge we found was the provisions of the law. At that time, unlike now, it is very explicit that the Electoral Commission, the drug enforcement, the Anti-Corruption Commission, the police, have the powers to enforce the provisions of the act. So even the powers to prosecute. At that time it wasn't that

clear. So different institutions would hide behind that elections are the responsibility of the Electoral Commission.

So even with the police we had a situation where if a complainant would go to the police station to complain about an electoral malpractice or something they would say, "Oh, that has to do with the elections, we don't handle such, go to the Electoral Commission." Yet police service is supposed to police all areas of malpractice, whether it is electoral or under the penal code or general. So we had that challenge.

As an Electoral Commission we really didn't have enforcement powers where we could penalize people who had abrogated the law and so forth. We had an electoral code of conduct which in itself was a good document, but enforcement was still a challenge. The same people who had been part of bringing about the code of conduct, breaking the law. Even now we still think that maybe the penalties are not punitive enough to make people feel that—to scare people off from breaking the law. So that is what motivated the commission to set up the Conflict Management Committee.

So like I said we had initial training and the support of EISA, the Electoral Institute of Southern Africa, and also our regional electoral management body organization which is called the Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC (Southern Africa Development Community) countries. So it was like a joint sponsorship. Like I said earlier [Elona Tip] came through as the lead trainer and myself and other senior officers at the Electoral Commission were trained in conflict management for us to be able to train others.

Thereafter we worked on, EISA helped us with the initial manuals but they were not found to be very user friendly because most of the situations were sort of like the South African setting. It was after that we decided to undertake a review of our manuals. I think we first did that in 2006 and then we had another review for last year.

I think now the manuals that we have now are considered to be excellent for our use, user-friendly for our use. The situations that are in the manuals relate to what actually happens here in Zambia. I'm sure our legal team, who takes the lead in our conflict management activities will brief you that we just recently had a review of how user-friendly the user manuals were, how effective they were for this last election. Based on that we will be able to make further improvements to the manual.

JACKSON: What sort of situations were missing initially from the manuals?

ISAAC: *I think basically it was the practical exercises that trainers would use to take/ to train the conflict committee members. You know the exercises that related to what happens in the Zambian setting, I think that was the main issue.*

JACKSON: So then once the training had begun and you started setting up the committees, how did you find members for the conflict management committees?

ISAAC: *What we did is, because we have the conflict management committees at two levels. We have the National Conflict Management Committee and then we have the District Conflict Management Committees. When we initially set them up we had 72 districts and then for last year's elections we had 74 districts. The number*

of our districts has since gone up; I think it is 84 or 86 because we had new districts set up.

In terms of reference the first category of members was from political parties. We said that all registered political parties were eligible for membership to the National Conflict Management Committee. Because we have about 33 or 34 registered political parties it means it is quite a large membership. Of course not all political parties are politically active. Usually you find that in terms of attendance—and legal will be able to give you a better perspective of attendance, you will find that you will have regular attendance by the political parties that are more politically active. Then of course others are still free to attend. So the numbers may fluctuate in terms of attendance.

But you find that during elections you'll find that those political parties that are participating in elections would definitely ensure that they attend meetings unless they are otherwise unable to.

So you have representation from political parties. You also have representation from civil society. We looked at civil society that are usually active, that are governance civil societies that are involved in governance-related activities. These are like known to us and they should be registered with the registrar of societies. And then we have membership from the police service, from the Anti-Corruption Commission, and from the Drug Enforcement Commission. We have representation from the church and other faith-based organizations like for instance the Muslim community also has representation on the Conflict Management Committee. So that is how the composition is made of our membership.

We write to the listed organizations that we have identified for membership and ask them to nominate someone to sit on the committee. We prefer that that person becomes a regular member and avoids proxies for continuity. But we also expect that a member that is assigned to our committee does brief their respective political party, share the minutes and the program of activities with their respective organization so that the organizations are kept in the loop.

I think within the terms of reference, more of which can be provided by our legal department there is also a provision where one can lose their membership on certain grounds, either at an individual level or as an institution. Because there are times where maybe because of certain abrogations of the terms of reference, we may ask an organization to replace the person who is representing them. I'm not too sure if we have had any such. I know voter education we had a few cases but I'm not too sure if we've had any such cases on the Conflict Management committee.

The composition at district level is similar. But of course at district level you won't have the same number of political parties that are active, it will vary from district to district.

JACKSON: I see. So what was the experience using the Conflict Management Committees at both the national and district level during the 2006 election? My understanding is that that was the first election in which they were involved?

ISAAC: Yes. I think it worked well. There were different complaints across the country but most of them were issues of disturbing campaign meetings, defacing posters or

removing posters, character assassination at different levels. In such cases where there was character assassination, in inverted commas, I think that would be given that if somebody really felt that they could use it as a basis for petitioning use of government resources because our law provides that it is only the President and the Vice President who are allowed to use government resources during their campaigns. We still would get some complaints, and we still get them now where there are accusations of officers from the ruling party using their vehicles—especially during by-elections because during by-elections ministers are still in office. When we have a general election it is different because Parliament is dissolved. So, in fact, the official vehicles are supposed to be withdrawn. But you still get some isolated cases where government vehicles were being used.

Then of course we get complaints of vote buying in two forms. Either the voter's card being taken off individuals and they're given money for it and they say, "Oh no, we'll give it back to you after the election or on Election Day." And you find that they don't do it—they don't give them back on Election Day; they only get it back after Election Day.

And other cases where there are massive handouts of food and drinks and whatever. So those are the main types of complaints that we would get. Some of the complaints were resolved at Conflict Management Committee meeting but there were some where people felt so strongly, especially if an individual lost an election, that they would use them as a grounds for petition.

JACKSON: I see.

ISAAC: *Then of course the procedure is that you need to—if you have a complaint you should submit it in writing to the secretary of the Conflict Management Committee, whether it is at national or district level. If it is at district level the committee sits. If you're not satisfied with the outcome of the meeting then you are free to appeal to the National Conflict Management Committee. If the National Conflict Management Committee is not satisfied, their decision is not satisfactory, then you can ask for your matter to be referred to the commission.*

If at commission level you are still not satisfied then you have an option of maybe taking the matter to the police depending on the seriousness of your complaint or addressing it through an election commission. But an election petition you can only commence after an election when the results have been declared.

JACKSON: Do you find that many of the complaints are resolved at the district or national level or do many of them go on to the commission?

ISAAC: *I think the number that is being resolved at district level is increasing. Last year we did have a few that were dealt with by the National Conflict Management Committee, I think there were about seven that were dealt with. At Commission level I can't remember exactly, I think we had one. Yes, at Commission level we dealt with those mainly to do with the media where the opposition political parties were complaining about the ruling party monopolizing especially television, the national television. We had to step in on that one.*

On several occasions we had to call in the media, both from the public media and the private media to sort of censure them to say—on their mode of reporting

because we find that some of the private media, including radio, were over—were being over-sensational on certain matters which we thought would cause unnecessary alarm to the public.

Then also we called in the public media and reminded them of their public duty to balance the coverage of both the opposition and the ruling party. At the time we actually instructed them to stop running—there were two programs, one advert and another program that we instructed—yes, two adverts that we instructed them to stop running because we felt that it was giving them undue advantage over the opposition in the nature of the programming.

To some extent we received some cooperation from the public media but you could see that they were under a lot of pressure from their employers, being government employees. Private media it was not that easy because we don't really have control over them. It is really depending on their good will as to whether they will listen to what we have to say or not. But of course they are not immune to being prosecuted because there are certain things in the code that they have to follow like keeping recordings of their programming and so forth. If they don't they can be liable to prosecution, either fine or even being jailed if it is a specific individual.

We had a case in 2006 where one of the reporters for a community radio station erased an interview which was the subject of an election—which ended up being a subject of an election petition. So when the recording was asked for they didn't have it because this individual had erased it. So they were fined.

JACKSON: I see.

ISAAC: Yeah, they were fined.

JACKSON: So if there is a complaint that a political party is handing out food for example, what sort of sanctions would they face from either a district committee or the national committee?

ISAAC: *The committee really doesn't have—their powers are limited. Because basically it ends at—what can I say? Like rapping a ruler over their knuckles but not much beyond that. The committees don't have the power to prosecute anybody or to conduct a civil arrest. They don't have—so it is mainly to admonish—to admonish and say look, please, you know that you're not supposed to do it, don't do it again. You'd be depending on the good will of the party.*

Usually the party will argue that they are handing out food to their supporters, their foot soldiers, in inverted commas, but if you get to the bottom of the matter you find that maybe it has gone beyond their foot soldiers and it is actually now—they are actually targeting the electorate. It is just that we still have some petitions in court, even at a PO-level so I can't really go into much detail as to what the complaints for last year were until the court proceedings are concluded.

Like I said they can't do something like disqualify a candidate on account of them being found wanting. They can't reorder a recount of votes at a polling station and so forth. We also discouraged them from operating as monitors or observers in a polling station because they may become the subject of a conflict which would not auger well. We would rather that they vote, go home, and if there is

any issue on Election Day that needs their attention that they are just called for a meeting.

Like I said they can't fine anybody.

JACKSON: So do you find that the admonishment or the public reprimand is effective in terms of discouraging political parties from breaking the code?

ISAAC: *To some extent in that you'd fine that if the problem, the issue is resolved with a particular party, then it wouldn't like really recur. I'm not too sure if we have had cases where the same political party committing the same offense after it having been resolved. There has been, to a large extent some good will.*

I'll be going to Mufumbwe on Friday, no tomorrow actually, where we're having a by-election so we'll be meeting with the [indecipherable 00:27:47] and find out and also with the Conflict Management Committee chairperson to find out what issues have been raised. So when you get back to the States you can send me an e-mail and I can let you know how Mufumbwe went.

JACKSON: I'd love to hear that, thank you.

ISAAC: *As a Commission we feel that if we had stronger powers like to disqualify a candidate, we think that would be very effective. Right now people can get arrested and thrown in jail pending trial and so forth, but if you throw in like party supporters or [indecipherable 00:28:19], you know these people who make noise and throw them in, there will always be others outside that can be recruited to continue with the noise making and if they want to be used for trouble making and so forth. You get my point?*

JACKSON: Yes.

ISAAC: *But if we had something stronger like saying that you can disqualify a candidate, I think it would make people think twice about misbehaving. Because can you imagine if you had disqualified nominations it means that the party cannot nominate anybody else to replace you, it means you as an individual cannot take part in an election. If you look at the cost that goes into campaigning and just participating in elections it is a lot of money which we don't think, anybody, either political party or an individual would want to risk losing through a disqualification. So we think that would be very effective. We also think that while the commission would have the power to disqualify, maybe it would be better to have an intervening party that would actually do the hearing, like the conflict management committees and then make a recommendation or make a ruling for disqualification to the commission which the commission with narrowly effect rather than the commission being the prosecutor, jury and judge at the same time. I would think it would be better to have that distinction.*

I strongly feel if we had that provision I think it would be very effective. Currently our law does not give us—the main law does not give us that power to have that provision because it would exceed the powers that we have been given by law. But if we could have that either as a constitutional provision or a provision in the Act then it would be something we could have even in the code of conduct.

JACKSON: So do you think beyond the actual ability to sanction political parties, do you think the Conflict Management Committees have been effective in reducing conflict between political party supporters?

ISAAC: *Yes, I think they have. Like I said, you know, in Zambia we have a lot of good will. By nature our elections are of a peaceful nature. Even if you do have acrimony between political parties, it is very fine here. Even here, they may disagree when we are having a meeting but the minute they walk out the door, you know, they are laughing, and you know completely different people and maybe even gang up to dis the Electoral Commission and then you wonder, I thought these were the ones who were sitting around the table having coffee and they were the ones quarreling. Now outside they are a united force against the Electoral Commission over something small or whatever.*

So I think they have, in their own way. I don't know if you've had a chance to speak to any of the political parties because you have a few individuals who feel that maybe they're not that effective. But I think to a certain extent they have been helpful. At least it has also reduced on the number of complaints that we have to deal with as a commission. Can you imagine, during an election, you are busy worrying about logistics and then you are continuously getting phone calls or fax messages or visitors coming through for us to sort out conflicts. But you would find, because they are there in the—especially in the districts outside Lusaka, I find that they are used more. I think they are found to be more useful than Lusaka. I think in Lusaka we had complaints where a complaint would be found and you call people for a meeting and either the complainant doesn't pitch up or the respondent doesn't pitch up or both don't pitch up. I think that's where they had those challenges. So of course where people don't come and they don't pitch up then you can't sit and hear the matter. Then the assumption is that okay, they've decided to either let sleeping dogs lie or they've resolved it themselves or maybe they feel they can't be bothered because they feel that there are no real penalties that can be meted out against an individual.

But in the districts you get several reports on how meetings have gone and how conflicts have been resolved which I think is a good thing.

JACKSON: And so going back to the specific elections, my understanding was that—so 2006 was the first election where they were used in full force. And, then there were some challenges in 2008 because of the very short timeline.

ISAAC: Yes.

JACKSON: I was hoping maybe you could walk me through that and then the changes that you made for 2011 which allowed you to implement them more effectively.

ISAAC: *Okay, I'll have to confess Rachel I wasn't very involved with the Conflict Management Committees because of my schedule. In 2008 I was in the Elections Department and concentrating on logistics. Even when we had Conflict Management Committee meetings I would be required to sit in but I have to confess I think I only sat in on one or two because of my schedule.*

I think when you speak to Eric he will be able to give you more insight into the improvements that were done. But, what I do recall is we looked at the numbers. Because we found that in some districts some committees would be as large as 15, maybe go up to twenty, we felt that that wasn't a healthy number to sit down

and listen to a problem. So what we decided is that restrict the number to about eight, seven to eight can sit to hear a complaint. If it is not resolved in the first sitting then when the next meeting is called to finish off the matter then you have the same grouping of members to sit in.

That of course raised the eyebrows because people do get a sitting allowance and it is something they appreciate getting. They also want to participate in the process. So we said that the composition of members should be on a rotational basis. The only people that wouldn't change would be the Council Secretary or Town Clerk and the administrative officer who serve as a secretary. Of course the chairperson and the vice-chair, but the other members could be rotated so everybody could at least have an opportunity to hear a matter.

Then the other thing, the other change that I think was made from 2006 to 2008 was to ensure that the chairperson of the committee should not belong to a political party, should be somebody neutral because of vested interests in an election. So that was one change that we effected in the terms of reference.

The chairpersons at district level are chosen by the district members but at the national level we appoint the chairperson, Mr. Isaac, whom you are going to meet.

JACKSON: Yes.

ISAAC: *I think you will have a very, very interesting chat with him. He will give you a lot of insight, especially on the matters that they had to deal with as a Conflict Management Committee.*

JACKSON: Yes, I'm looking forward to speaking with him.

ISAAC: *You'll find it very interesting.*

JACKSON: I was wondering, given the experience of 2011, do you think that there will be any new changes that you will make to the system moving forward?

ISAAC: *I think basically what we would like to do is have the electoral code of conduct strengthened. Whether we should give the Conflict Management Committee punitive powers or powers to effect penalties I think is something that we would have to consider carefully. Maybe they may remain at the level of recommendations because, as of now, they can recommend for, I think, the revocation of the appointment of an electoral officer, or an accredited observer or monitor if they are found to be in breach of the code of conduct and they have proof of that.*

Of course if that recommendation is made to the Commission, the Commission would need the full details. Because sometimes you get complaints from political parties that a particular electoral officer is partisan or hasn't conducted themselves in an acceptable manner. The same for monitors and observers. So that is really taken into account, what the Conflict Management Committee recommends is taken seriously because they are the people on the ground; they would be the ones to get the evidence and the facts of what has really transpired on the ground.

And usually if there is consensus among the political parties that they don't want a particular officer to superintend over an election then we usually go by their position. First of all we don't want the safety of the officer to be compromised. Also we don't want there to be a perception that the results have been compromised because the person who was conducting the election was not deemed to be credible.

We tried—I think most of the time the recommendations that we have gotten have been credible and justified and as a Commission we have acted upon them. But I think, like I said, if the electoral code of conduct were to be strengthened and maybe we were given additional powers to disqualify, maybe even charge a political party or candidate a fine, but I think the most effective one would be the disqualification one. I think it would be a good deterrent. Nobody wants to be able to not be able to take part in an election at the last minute because of something wrong that they have done.

JACKSON: So when you were trying to encourage people to go to the Conflict Management Committees, what was that process like? How did you get the political parties on board with the system?

ISAAC: *We briefed them on the establishment of the committees and what they were meant to achieve. We said we were hoping they would help in prevention of conflict and the management of conflict in all the stages, pre-election, during the election and post-election. So we explained this to them. We explained to them that we felt that disputes could best be resolved by themselves, by their engaging themselves.*

We told them what we were trying to promote is a less acrimonious environment. We didn't want an environment of acrimony. We didn't want an environment, like I said earlier on where we have to throw individuals into jail, keep them off the streets until after the election. We thought that the dispute resolution process can be as harmonious as possible. Whenever we do a review of the electoral code of conduct we involve the political parties. We actually go through each provision with them and get agreement and consensus.

There would be certain ones, where as a commission we would say no but this one would be like this. So like I said, we had a lot of good will from political parties and cooperation. Like I said, there are some who are skeptical, some individuals who are skeptical about the Conflict Management Committee, would rather—maybe there is a situation, we just collect everybody and throw them in jail, keep them off the streets until after the election. But we are trying to avoid that.

Also we do try to—sometimes we do make public some of our decisions. Sometimes we say, it has calmed down, let's not remind people, open up old wounds and leave it. But where we feel it is necessary to publicize we do. We also have what we call political party liaison committee which we set up for the 2008 election. I believe it worked very well. It was operational alongside the Conflict Management Committee. This committee looks at all issues pertaining to the electoral process.

We meet on a quarterly basis and if the commission needs there is an urgent need for a meeting we will meet outside the quarterly meetings. Also political parties are free to call upon us to organize a meeting if there is an issue that they

are concerned with. Last year we had quite a number of incidents of violence here in Lusaka. So we actually had to call for an emergency meeting to call upon political parties to restrain themselves and to campaign harmoniously side-by-side.

At the end of that meeting which was a few weeks before the election, they actually signed a communique stating that they were not in support of violence and that they were going to ensure as much as possible that the elections were peaceful and that they would restrain their cadres and supporters from engaging, from provoking each other and engaging in violent activities and any other mischief.

JACKSON: How effective do you think that communique was?

ISAAC: *I'm trying to remember now. On the day we signed it they were battering each other in the town center. In the midst of signing they were getting phone calls. What happened now—they were saying look now what is happening. We have been here discussing nonviolence and you are at each other's throats in the city. But I think after that it was relatively quiet.*

We went public, we published it in the media, the print and local media and after that it was relatively quiet. We did have some skirmishes on Election Day but that was because some of the pollsters didn't follow instructions and delivered election materials late. So we had some skirmishes in that regard. But after—as we went towards the transmission of results, the compiling of results, we had some anxieties from the opposition, the political parties. We had to involve the police to protect our staff who were transporting the polling station results to the main tallying center.

After that it was relatively quiet. Then now, when we started receiving the compiled constituency results from the totaling centers for the presidential to be totaled up here in Lusaka, then it started getting tense again. But that tension was more of the anxiety with regard to the outcome of the election than anything else. I think now the focus was from political parties to access the Commission. So it was now us who were under focus and had to take extra care about our movements and so forth.

JACKSON: And during that period did you use the Conflict Management Committees or the liaison committee?

ISAAC: *Not to do with the skirmishes, we had to do with results. In fact that one was being handled directly by us as a commission and whoever had queries and was wondering what was going on was getting in touch with us directly.*

JACKSON: What other sorts of issues did the liaison committee deal with after it was first established?

ISAAC: *The political party liaison committee of course was concerned about the code of conduct which they had helped develop which they felt was still not strong enough so we went to do another review. They were involved. They had representation. They were concerned about how we were going to manage results, the results management system, because we managed them electronically. So they were taken through the process we organized. I think it was a one-day workshop where we took them through the process.*

During the run-up to last year's election, they were concerned about the voter registration. What we did was we did a mobile registration where we went around. In each district we had teams of mobile—for mobile registration. So people from all the polling stations could access as opposed to being stationed at one polling station. This was because of the change in technology that we had used.

We were now using laptops to do the registration and immediately issue the voters count. Now because of the cost we had limitations in terms of the numbers. I think we only managed to acquire about 1,000 and we have 6,456 stations. For that registration we couldn't deploy a registration center to each center like we previously did when we were doing it manually and using instamatic camera.

So this time the teams had to go around and position themselves at the centers for a certain period of time for people to access. So political parties had concerns about that. But we did very well. The number of registered voters went up from 3.9 to 5.1 which was pretty good. The majority of the registered voters were first-time voters. That was good. Of course they wanted to make sure that the register was clean-based. They had the concern of presence of deceased voters on the register. We did our best to clean up the register but there are still a quite—I think we have over 200,000—those are estimates.

Because it is a different institution that is responsible for recording births and deaths, it is a government department, they are not computerized, so it doesn't make it easy—it makes it very difficult for us to update our records. It is not like in other countries where maybe you could have a link and automatically get the data of dead people.

Then also having vast rural areas, that is another challenge because in the villages it is not all deaths that will be reported to the district center. People who die in the village, will be buried in the village and that's it. But each village head man is supposed to have a register, a village register, in which they report births and deaths. I don't know if they report marriages, but I know they are supposed to record births and deaths.

Right now; in fact you have just reminded me, I should have asked the team; we are trying to work out a system in certain districts, identified districts, that we can work with to work out how best we can collect data of dead voters to help us clean the register. So those are the issues that would concern the political parties. We would also be concerned about where the ballot papers are going to be printed; that is always an issue.

We used to print locally but with the review of the specifications of the ballot papers which are now in the law, our government printer currently doesn't have the capacity in terms of machinery and technology to print ballot papers to our specification. So right now we still have to outsource the printing of ballot papers outside the country because also there is no local printer with the capacity. Currently we print our ballot papers in the UK (United Kingdom) and that's where I had gone the past week just to observe how the printing went. They arrived on Monday.

What else? Concerns of the political party liaison committee sometimes will be the media; they always have issues with the media. The police, the police are always deemed to be favoring the ruling party in that they come down too hard on the opposition parties. Sometimes we get complaints that the managing of the rallies is not being fair. When the opposition wants to hold a rally they'll be told it is not convenient because of A, B, C, D but the ruling party is allowed to have their rallies. The media, like I said, public media concentrating on the ruling party, the private media being biased to certain opposition parties. Those were some of the issues they raised. What else? Basically those were—those are the general areas in which they would have concerns.

Another concern they had was how soon election results, particularly for presidential results would be declared. We set ourselves a target of 48 hours which I think we just managed to meet. We had to leave out results from seven constituencies because there is a provision in our law that allows us to make a projection as to whether if we made an assumption that all the voters in those remaining constituencies gave their votes to the runner up, the person who is second, whether it would make a difference to the status of the person in the lead. If it doesn't then it means that if all the votes were to come in number two would still remain number two.

So because, as I said, because of the pressure and the atmosphere, it was really electric; people were so anxious. I think the feeling was that people were not going to—the Commission is not going to treat the results as they should be treated, they thought there was going to be some manipulation.

The Commission thought it would be in their best interest not to wait overnight for the remaining seven constituencies because there was not guarantee that we would get them on time because they were in very outlying areas and at the last moment we had to contract the Air Force to go and collect the results for us. It is from Western Province. So we—in that regard we made a decision to go ahead and release the final results without the seven.

After checking our math over and over again we did that. So basically those are some of the challenges that we faced in the last election. But I am pleased to say that we got our math right. We declared the right candidate as we announced the right candidate as President. The declaration is done by the Chief Justice. We didn't shortchange anybody. We had peaceful transition with the new president.

JACKSON: That is quite a task.

ISAAC: *It is, it is. I've never—this last election was something else; I've never undergone such pressures. The thing about working in elections is when you're under pressure it spills over to your family and friends. They also get the brunt of it. I've got grown-up sons and they're well known and people know who I am. So they had to slow down on their clubbing the last two weeks before the election and they did it on their own. They said no, we think it is better that we're just home in the evenings because we don't want to get caught up in some argument. Somebody says something nasty about you and then you get up and say, "That's my mother" and you get into a fight or something.*

I'm glad it went well. At least we have a good election on our record. It wasn't perfect, no election is perfect, but I think in all this, the greatest challenge in managing elections is the human factor. That is why we believe that if we can

strengthen the Conflict Management Committees, get people to appreciate them more, it would help. The code of conduct is there and it is a good piece of legislation. It is not that restrictive that it can't be followed. You know what I mean? If people didn't break the rules then we wouldn't be having the conflicts. But I suppose in other areas one would say rules are made to be broken.

Even when we are talking with politicians, politicians say, no, don't effect the code of conduct, you are toothless. So I said, but do you ever sit down and think that it should start with you? You should start obeying—all of you—all you politicians should obey the code of conduct. If you were to obey the code of conduct, I mean, we wouldn't have these issues.

Yeah, yeah, but you know the nature of politicians, that is what makes elections exciting. You know we have to make sure that we have people's support. I suppose having people's support means at times you dish out and go aboard. I always say to politicians, I said, all of you break the code of conduct. It is just that your capacity of what you do differs because the difference in the resources available to you. Those that have more resources will do—you will be more extravagant than those that have fewer resources.

Then of course if you see others being more extravagant you feel more disadvantaged. But they're all doing it at different levels. But I think as we go along we'll see a lot of improvement, especially with the disqualification. If we could have that disqualification close I think it would have a big effect.

JACKSON: Are you currently working to getting that power?

ISAAC: *Yes, but our constitution is currently under review; we're waiting for the review of the constitution. So depending on what comes up in the constitution. But we have made it known. In fact, we had included it last year. We had hoped that the constitution would have gone through last year but unfortunately it didn't. When it didn't we had to remove those provisions because they went beyond our powers. So that was it. We're hoping that this time around the constitution will go through and incorporate that provision for us to be able to have that close.*

JACKSON: I wanted to ask you if another Electoral Commission in another country was looking to deal with elections conflict, would you recommend the Conflict Management Committee to them and what advice would you give them in terms of putting the system in place?

ISAAC: *Definitely I would recommend it. You know, when you have political parties sitting around a table in spite of what goes on outside the commission, you know you help to build consensus, you help to build amicable working relationships among them. Of course you can't control how they deal with each other outside, but it is important to be able to bring people to a round table. Can you imagine if there were conflicts outside and you are not able to bring people around a table, I think it would be much worse.*

You find if a complainant comes and asks for a meeting to be called the Secretariat will send out notices. The other parties will come, they'll respond. Some of them—this is a small party and they are always complaining but they'll come. They'll make the effort and they will attend. If they are summoned by the Electoral Commission they will come. They have that integrity and that respect of the system.

What we have, the organs that we have put in place—I think it would work. I remember when I presented a paper in Malawi, was that 2009? They were preparing for their next election. They wanted to find out how our conflict management system had worked. I remember some, I think some of the participants were skeptical. They felt that the Electoral Commission wouldn't make the time for them. I said, no, no, no. I think you shouldn't think of it from that light, be very positive. Even if it is a new thing, or even if you feel it hasn't worked well enough before that you can either introduce it or improve on it.

For any country that would like to go in the direction that we have gone, I would advise that they take all the stakeholders onboard from the beginning. Call the political parties together and don't leave anybody out, don't say oh, those are small parties. You see, the minute you start calling a party small they take offence and they will say it openly. We have our following, it doesn't matter how many numbers we have. We have our following, we have a place and we have the right to exist as a political party.

So involve all political parties. Then of course you have the criteria for those who are registered. Because it is only those who are registered that can take part in elections. Involve all of them from the onset. Involve all the other players in the electoral process who do get up in conflict or have to help manage conflict like the police, civil society, the media. They are very commonly a source of conflict.

You have the media, then you have the other law enforcement agencies to sit in. So you have the expertise from the different other stakeholders and you have the operatives. You have everybody who is involved in the electoral process and who at one time or another might be caught up in a conflict situation. So if you have the consensus, then you are moving as a team from the start. You have everybody's buy-in. It is very important, for something to work you must have the buy-in of those who are going to participate. If you don't have the buy-in in it, then it won't work. You'll be calling for meetings, people will not reach out. People will file complaints; the person who is being complained about or the party who is being complained about won't even bother to pick up. So it is very important to have the buy-in.

Also a review of the code of conduct to see how effective it is, how practical it is should also be done. Elections shouldn't be seen as a time for getting even, no, you are competing at Parliamentary level, local government level and even at presidential level, but elections shouldn't be seen as a time for getting even.

Elections at the same time can be so interesting. There are very amusing incidents that take place during elections. People, even though there was tension at the time, will laugh over after an election. I think during the interview I told you about the chap who used to come to a rally with [indecipherable 01:02:49] in the back of his vanette to disrupt his colleagues. So different—it is important to have the buy-in of the stakeholders. It is important to emphasize that the establishment of these committees is not which hand or to penalize anybody unnecessarily, but to ensure that—. In fact, it should be looking at conflict prevention, minimize the conflicts as much as possible because you have these organs in place. Then if you do have your disputes then you have a reputable organ that can deal with this.

I don't know—when you sit in a Conflict Management Committee meeting, I haven't done so in a long time, these political parties have a way of sorting each other out; I've seen it in the political party liaison committee. You find, even if I want to intervene as chair, amongst themselves they sorted each other out. No, you're talking nonsense. That's bullocks. The issues are sorted out. So I think it is very beneficial and I would encourage any EMB, especially if you are coming from a conflict electoral background. I think it is very important, a very important tool for managing conflict.

JACKSON: Are there any specific techniques to secure buy-in that you would recommend?

ISAAC: Sorry?

JACKSON: Are there any specific methods to get the political parties and the civil society to buy into the system?

ISAAC: *Basically what it is is we normally call them in for a round table meeting and you can do it—I can't remember how we did it. You can do it in tranches actually. Either you call in the political parties first and have a discussion with them, because there are certain things that political parties want to discuss with an EMB but not in the presence of others. So call them in, discuss, say, look, this is what we want to do. Get their views.*

Then call in the civil society, discuss with them and a mix of others. Then maybe you could meet with the police and others separately depending. You gauge, it depends on the kind of environment, move the idea to them. Sometimes it is better to do it in smaller groups because of the numbers.

Like for us, I've said we were talking of already 33 political parties. So if you want people to be able to understand your concept, where you're coming from and what your vision is, where you want to go, the objective, a smaller group is better because then you have—the interaction is closer and easier and you have time to answer questions, clarify things.

Then when you've got done, laid that groundwork, then call everybody in together and say look, now we have spoken to all of you; this is the way forward. We want to start working on the terms of reference. I think for us we drafted the terms of reference and we shared them. In fact you do a brainstorming—. We would have an outline of what we were thinking, do a brainstorming with them, put that together, go through it, agree or disagree. What are the things we should have, even if you as stakeholders don't like it because sometimes things that may come too hard on them they may not want. They think oh no, they will come on to hard on us.

If as an EMB you feel it is really necessary or by law it is required then you have that. So that even the terms of reference on how the committee will run will be dependent on the consensus of everybody. Once you have that consensus then you know, once you start operating, it will not be credible for someone to stand up and say no, no, I don't like this. Because everybody will have consulted. There are certain things that the commission may dictate like the membership. No, the political party, says no, we don't want that one because of blah, blah, blah. Sometimes we've had individuals with individuals and we have asked an organization to change, to say—people are uncomfortable with this one, can you find somebody else.

Sometimes we have had to say no, we cannot take this organization on as a member because we are not satisfied that they are either credible enough or add value. We have to weight that. We have had a lot of accusations from political parties saying that some CSOs are not impartial. We had a lot of that last year. We had a lot of CSOs that were openly in favor of a particular political party. So I think if you operate on it from that perspective it can work. But the buy-in is key.

JACKSON: The only aspect I think we haven't really discussed is the relationship between the CMCs and law enforcement. I know that there are representatives of the police who are on the Conflict Management Committees but I was curious how the relationship between the two bodies work.

ISAAC: *I think Eric will be able to give you more on that. But I think it is okay. Of course there will be instances where political parties will complain that the police have not been proactive enough or being forceful enough or paying attention to their complaints. There are times when the opposition political parties will complain of harassment by the police.*

But what we are trying to do is to build rapport between political parties and the police. We are trying to have intermediary law. Though they were not invited—like you said they sit on the Conflict Management Committee but outside that, the last political party liaison committee we had in preparation for this forthcoming by-election, we invited the Inspector-General of Police. She came. She was very gracious and she came with some of her senior officers and had a very candid discussion with political parties.

The political parties were very forthright and came out with their very strong opinions on how they feel the police are operating. So it was good for her to hear it from them, from the horse's mouth. So we are hoping—that is why we are going to Mufumbwe tomorrow. We want to go and see how the preparations have been going and how the police have been operating and so forth. That is why we will meet with Conflict Management Committee just to find out how things have been going.

Over the years the opposition has always been complaining that the police are pro-ruling party and very hard on them. From this new initiative we have taken I hope we can see an improvement. So far I haven't received any calls complaining about the police. Maybe we will face them when we get there.

JACKSON: Those are all the questions I have. Is there any aspect of the Conflict Management committees or the political party liaison committee that we haven't discussed that you think is important to consider?

ISAAC: *No, I don't think so. I think Eric and the others will be able to fill in a lot of gaps. I think when you speak to the chairperson of the committee, like I said you'll get a lot more insight on cases that they have actually handled. So I think you'll be able to fill in a lot of gaps where I have not maybe given enough. It is a very interesting area. I wish my job would allow me to have more time to sit in on hearings and take a more active role. But I supposed also given my position sometimes I have to be a bit distant and not become a subject of conflict myself. But I think you'll get a lot of insight, like I said from Mr. Isaac, Eric and the others.*

JACKSON: Thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed today.

ISAAC: Thank you very much Rachel, I hope that I have been of help.