

IEC mulls specialised courts for elections

The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) is exploring the possibility of setting up specialised courts to deal with any electoral crimes committed during the election period, the chairperson of the IEC Pansy Tlakula told Parliament this week.

Briefing the National Assembly's portfolio committee on home affairs, Tlakula said the specialised courts could be similar to those set up during the 2010 World Cup - which resulted in cases linked to the event being expedited.

The five-year term for the current National Assembly expires on 21 April next year and in terms of the Electoral Amendment Act, elections must be held within 90 days of the expiry of the term of the current National Assembly, with the election date to be proclaimed by the President.

Tlakula said the enforcement of the code of conduct remained one of the country's key challenges during the elections, adding that police and prosecution authorities would receive extra training to ensure that they were well versed in the code of conduct.

The IEC is also concerned about the credibility of the voters' roll and Tlakula singled out the commission's recent investigation into the Ward 22 by-election in the Abaqulusi Municipality, in which it was found that over 1,200 voters were bussed into the ward for the by-election.

She said the municipality was one of three municipalities in KwaZulu-Natal where the commission was concerned about electoral fraud.

The Ward 22 by-election was to have been held on Wednesday, but was halted by a court interdict until 20 August and that the IEC produce papers to the electoral court with evidence of the bussing in of voters from outside the ward.

The commission's other concerns include those places where protests were taking place over demarcation issues and the low number of youth registered to vote - with, for example, just 12% of those aged 18 and 19 and 65% of those aged 20 to 29 having registered so far, most of them in metro areas.

To deal with those areas where there was a threat of protests, the commission would run civic education programmes, while it planned to attract the youth to register and vote, through the use of social media platforms and a cellphone-friendly website.

The commission is also planning a conference for next month in which youth from Southern African countries will be able to share views on election issues, and the commission hopes that this will spur the involvement of more youth in the coming elections.

To prepare for the elections, the commission has taken a number of other steps, including collaborating with Chapter 9 institutions and holding consultations with organised business, schools, labour organisations, the media and government departments.

Officials to be recruited

A total of 250,000 election officials will be recruited for the elections through recruitment criteria developed with political parties and objections can be made by the public to any of the appointments.

Those officials appointed will then receive training before the Election Day, as will party agents and police officers.

Election materials are planned for delivery from January and tenders for security warehousing services are undergoing evaluation before being awarded.

The provision of ballot sheets will be linked to the registered voters, but the commission will hold a small surplus equivalent to less than 5% of total stock.

As registered voters will be able to vote at any voting station within their registered province, this will ensure that the commission does not run out of ballot sheets at particular voting stations.

A tender invitation will be issued shortly to ICT audit firms to undertake independent tests of the results systems to ensure that the system is secure from hacking or other tampering.

At least two dry runs of the IT system will be undertaken with all offices involved.

The commission has also tested the new ID smartcard, which the Department of Home Affairs plans to begin rolling out this year.

The counting of special votes, including those voting outside the country, will take place once voting stations have been closed and counting has commenced.

Transparent bags will be used to secure the authenticity of result slips, and party agents and security officials will accompany the bags to the results station.

After auditors have confirmed results, a fail-safe system will also be used to ensure that the number of votes counted does not exceed the number of registered voters.

Political parties and members of the media will also be given access to the IEC's systems to verify any results should they wish to.

Once elections have been proclaimed the voters' roll, as it stands at the proclamation date, will be used for elections.

Following the proclamation, an election timetable will be drafted by the commission, which will then consult with political parties before the timetable is finalised and gazetted.

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