

Harare, Zimbabwe, May 22 (Infosplusgabon) - Zimbabwe has applied to re-join the Commonwealth it left in 2003 and has invited the grouping of former British colonies to send observers to its general elections set for July.

Zimbabwe's proposal was in a letter dated 9 May and sent by President Emmerson Mnangagwa to Commonwealth Secretary-General Patricia Scotland.

"The Secretary-General was delighted to receive the letter," read an announcement issued on Monday by the Commonwealth Secretariat in London. "I whole-heartedly echo the sentiments of Heads of Government who have said twice, in 2009 and subsequently in 2011, that they very much look forward to Zimbabwe's return when the conditions are right. Zimbabwe's eventual return to the Commonwealth, following a successful membership application, would be a momentous occasion, given our shared rich history," said Ms. Scotland.

Zimbabwe joined the Commonwealth on its independence in 1980 and withdrew from the organisation in 2003 after its former leader Robert Mugabe came under criticism over disputed elections and land seizures from white farmers.

To re-join, Zimbabwe must demonstrate that it complies with the fundamental values set out in the Commonwealth Charter, including democracy and rule of law plus protection of human

rights such as freedom of expression.

The membership process requires an informal assessment to be undertaken by representatives of the Secretary-General, followed by consultations with other Commonwealth countries.

Zimbabwe has also invited the Commonwealth to observe its forthcoming elections in July. The Secretariat said it was mobilising a team of observers to do so – and their observations would form part of the Secretary-General's informal assessment.

“I urge the government, opposition parties, the election management body, civil society, and all stakeholders, to play their part in ensuring a credible, peaceful and inclusive process that restores citizens' confidence, trust and hope in the development and democratic trajectory of their country,” stated Secretary-General Scotland.

The presidential, parliamentary and council elections are seen as a litmus test of Mnangagwa's democratic credentials and if agreed by Western powers, international lenders could begin lending to the country for the first time in 20 years.

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