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### **Concern In Southern Africa About Proposal To Extend Mugabe Term**

Senior officials of some Southern African Development Community member nations are privately expressing concern at a proposal mooted by Zimbabwe's ruling Zanu PF party to extend the term of president Robert Mugabe by two years with a constitutional amendment postponing the 2008 presidential election.

Eight of Zanu PF 10 provincial organizations backed the proposal to harmonize the presidential and parliamentary election schedule by holding both ballots in 2010. The resolution was referred to Zanu PF central committee for further consideration.

Sources in SADC capitals said the countries most concerned at the term-extension proposal are South Africa, Botswana and Lesotho. All three have been working behind the scenes to dispatch a fact-finding mission to Zimbabwe to prepare a report on the crisis to be presented to SADC's committee on politics and defense.

Zimbabwean Deputy Information Minister Bright Matonga was quoted in the Sunday Mirror paper saying Harare has heard nothing about the delegation. Foreign Ministry sources said, however, that Harare has told SADC administrators the proposed fact-finding group will not be welcome as it was not constituted by a SADC summit.

At the ruling party's annual conference earlier this month, President Mugabe said he would not tolerate interference from other countries in the region.

South African Deputy Foreign Minister Aziz Pahad is the only official so far to have issued any public comment on the need for a mission by SADC ministers.

Researcher Chris Maroleng of the Institute for Security Studies in South Africa told reporter Blessing Zulu of VOA's Studio 7 for Zimbabwe that SADC's move is welcome because the regional spillover effect of the Zimbabwe crisis is growing.

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