



Women Cast Their Historic Vote at Local and Regional Levels: Gender Election Observation Mission (GEOM) for Municipal and Regional Elections of 4 September in Morocco

Preliminary Statement presented by Head of Mission Ms. Sabra Bano
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Gender Concerns International congratulates the National Human Rights Council (CNDH), the Ministry of Interior, and the women and men of Morocco on the success of the historic municipal and regional elections that took place across the country on Friday 4 September. The participation of women and men alongside each other at polling stations is an inspiring indicator of democratic progress in Morocco.

Overall, electoral administration at observed polling centres was satisfactory in facilitating the vote. The presence of security forces at the centres was visible and organised to encourage voters to turnout to make their choice in the first-ever municipal and regional elections.

The Gender Election Observation Mission (GEOM) observed polling centres in major cities and selected towns in various areas of the country. The GEOM is the only international electoral observation mission that features an all-female observation team to ensure that elections are observed exclusively from a gender perspective.

At the welcome invitation of the CNDH, Gender Concerns was honoured to deploy a team of seven international experts and national staff, in co-operation with local organisations including the Alliance of Youth for Reform, the Association of Women's Creativity, and the Centre for the Rights of People. The overall aim of the GEOM Morocco 2015 is to observe and document the gender aspects of election management with the ultimate aim of supporting inclusive electoral reform.

This was a historic event for Morocco as well as for the GEOM programme in observing for the first time elections at local and regional levels around the country. It should be noted that of registered voters in Morocco for the 4 September elections, 55 percent were male and 45 percent were female.

Female leadership at local levels is key to progress on the road to democracy for all citizens. This Preliminary Statement outlines the GEOM observations and findings at polling stations observed, to help enable the free and fair participation of women in deciding the future of governance structures and leadership roles. A further evaluation of gender-inclusive electoral processes, policies and recommendations will be published in the GEOM Final Report at the conclusion of the mission.

Gender Election Observation Mission (GEOM) observations

Outside polling centres and stations

- 1) Women were observed moving freely in and out of polling centres: alone, in groups, and with family members and children. There were no visible incidents of pressure to influence women voters near the polling centres, or related incidents of this type.
- 2) Although security forces were generally present outside of polling centres observed, female security personnel were under-represented, in comparison with the female/male voter ratio at the polling centres.

Inside polling centres and stations

(Management)

- 1) Women were poorly-represented as polling centre coordinators.
- 2) Women were under-represented as heads of polling stations.
- 3) Polling station staff teams were predominately male.
- 4) Waiting lines were not formed *outside* polling stations – which at times created large numbers of female voters inside the station, causing confusion and chaotic situations, undermining the authority of polling station staff.
- 5) There were proportionally more incidents observed of confusion on women's names included on voter registration lists, which created some disturbance in voting procedure, causing women to leave polling stations under sometimes stressful circumstances. At one polling station observed at closing time, a larger percentage of women – including elderly women and women with children – were waiting for verification of their registration on voting lists. Some in this group left the station without casting their vote.
- 6) Efforts were made at a number of polling stations to record the number of female and male voters, but some polling stations were not recording the sex-disaggregated data, and only one station had a standardized form to do so. Most stations that did collect sex-disaggregated data did so informally.

(Political agents, missions and other observations)

- 7) Political party representatives observing inside polling stations were predominately male, and were in some cases giving instructions to women voters that interfered in the voting process.
- 8) No other international observer missions were seen inside polling stations.
- 9) Very few national observer mission representatives were seen inside polling stations; of these national observers, women were under-represented.
- 10) Elderly women voters were often observed receiving help accessing voting facilities.

GEOM preliminary recommendations

- 1) Appoint a larger percentage of women as polling centre coordinators, polling station presidents and polling station staff to more closely reflect the national percentage of male and female voters.
- 2) Evaluate the need for additional training for voter registration officials and polling station staff in the formulation and implementation of voter registration lists.
- 3) Increase the percentage of women as political party observers at polling stations, and provide additional training on guidelines for their official conduct within polling stations.
- 4) Increase the number of female security personnel at polling centres (particularly in rural areas) in order to raise potential for higher female voter confidence and turnout.
- 5) Create a gender-in-elections unit within the national election management body to oversee inclusion of women within all aspects of electoral processes.
- 6) Implement collection of sex-disaggregated data at all polling stations with standardized forms, and evaluate the percentage by area to identify trends in female voter turnout and the determining influences.
- 7) Further increase national awareness-raising campaigns – including in rural areas and for illiterate women – for the need of identification cards to vote.
- 8) The composition of the newly-elected municipal and regional governments should grant Moroccan women the place they merit in governance and leadership roles.

More about Gender Concerns

Gender Concerns International supports women worldwide in claiming their role as “agents of change”. Currently, the organisation – based in The Hague, the Netherlands – is active in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Middle East-North Africa region. Following the success of the 2011 Morocco national election observation mission, a Gender Election Observation Mission has observed Moroccan elections from a gender perspective for a second consecutive time.

As an organisation, Gender Concerns International has extensive international experience with GEOM in countries including Tunisia (2014 and 2011), Pakistan (2013 and 2008) and Libya (2012). A firm foundation of positive interaction and support of national election commissions in these countries has been built through previous missions to be able to successfully conduct the 2015 mission in Morocco.

This Morocco 2015 project promoting women’s governance at local levels is supported by the Embassy of the Netherlands to Morocco.

For further details and statistics on observations
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