

COMMONWEALTH OBSERVER GROUP
GHANA PRESIDENTIAL AND PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS
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Interim Statement by Baroness Valerie Amos
Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group

The Republic of Ghana held its fifth presidential and parliamentary elections on 7 December since the return to multi-party democracy in 1992. These presidential and parliamentary elections are significant and transitional in terms of Ghana's maturing democracy. It will be the second time one elected leader will hand over political power to another.

Like the previous elections under Ghana's Fourth Republic, the elections were intensely contested with 8 presidential candidates and 1060 parliamentary candidates who competed for 230 seats. Presidential and parliamentary candidates were both drawn from eight political parties and independents.

The constitutional and legal framework in place for the presidential and parliamentary elections is in line with international standards for the conduct of credible elections, to which Ghana is a signatory.

The Constitution of Ghana clearly identifies and mandates the Electoral Commission of Ghana, as an independent commission to conduct and supervise all public elections and to perform such other functions as may be prescribed by law.

The results process is still ongoing. This interim statement reflects the observations and assessments of the Commonwealth Observer Group on the electoral process up to this point.

From the Group's observations thus far we find that the majority of voters were able to exercise their democratic right in a peaceful and orderly way. This was due in large part to the effective organisational machinery the Electoral Commission instituted to manage the electoral process. The process was transparent and polling staff worked diligently, often under challenging circumstances. The Commonwealth Observer Group commends the Electoral Commission of Ghana for the professional manner in which they conducted polling and counting. It is our hope that the concluding stages of the electoral process will be conducted in the same manner.

The Commonwealth Observer Group lauds the people of Ghana for their sense of responsibility and dedication in exercising the right to vote. Many showed extraordinary patience and discipline, particularly those who queued for long hours.

Our observations of the set-up and opening of the polls showed that there were some polling stations where the commencement of voting was delayed due to the late arrival

of materials. This early observed delay appeared not to lead to overall voter disenfranchisement.

The voting was generally peaceful and orderly. We commend the security services for carrying out their duties at the polling stations discreetly and with a high degree of professionalism. Though there were some disturbances at a number of polling stations, which could have compromised the security of the ballot, we were pleased with the responsiveness of the relevant authorities in addressing them.

There was voter uncertainty on some aspects of polling voting procedure. For example, some voters were unsure whether to use their index finger or thumb to mark the ballot paper slowing the voter process.

The secrecy of the vote was to a large extent protected. We noted that special provisions were made in several polling stations to assist disabled and elderly voters.

Despite widespread fears on the unreliability of the voters register, these translated on the day to observed instances of voters' names not being reflected on the transferred voters list. These omissions caused avoidable delays.

The closing of the polls largely followed prescribed guidelines. Voters who remained in the queue by the time the polls closed were allowed to cast their ballots. We found that the count was conducted efficiently, and with a high degree of transparency, in the presence of polling agents, domestic and international observers and encouragingly many members of the public who also turned up to witness the process. All indicators of democracy's entrenchment in Ghana. We note the challenge posed by poor or inadequate lighting in many polling stations, which we believe need to be addressed for future elections.

The media, especially the FM radio stations and local television stations, set up special programmes to cover the elections. They gave their audiences an opportunity to report concerns, and as a result, transparency was improved and the relevant authorities were given an opportunity to respond to those concerns.

Our overall assessment thus far is that the observed voting and counting process has been conducted in a credible manner.

At this crucial stage of the electoral process, the Commonwealth Observer Group calls on all Ghanaians to continue to exercise patience as the Electoral Commission concludes its work.

The Commonwealth Observer Group will continue to follow the final stages of the results process. Our final report will cover technical aspects of the electoral process and make appropriate recommendations for the conduct of future elections.

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