



**PRELIMINARY STATEMENT OF THE AFRICAN UNION
OBSERVER MISSION
TO THE 29 MARCH, 2012 NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS
IN THE REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA**

A. INTRODUCTION

1. In response to the invitation of the Government of the Republic of The Gambia, and the Independent Electoral Commission for The Gambia (IEC), H. E. Jean Ping, Chairperson of the African Union (AU) Commission, dispatched an Observer Mission to The Gambia to observe the National Assembly elections, which were conducted 29 March, 2012.
2. The AU Observer Mission is led by Dr. Samuel Azu'u Fonkam, President, Elections Cameroon - ELECAM (The Independent Electoral Commission of Cameroon). The Mission is composed of twenty-two (22) members drawn from Elections Management Bodies (EMBs), National Parliaments, the Pan African Parliament, African Ambassadors accredited to the African Union in Addis Ababa, eminent personalities and members of Civil Society Organizations from various African countries.
3. The Mission Observers are drawn from Botswana, Burundi, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Rwanda, Saharawi Republic, Somalia, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.
4. The AU Observer Mission arrived in The Gambia on 22 March, 2012 and will remain in the country until 4 April, 2012.
5. The African Union Mission observed the 29 March 2012 National Assembly Elections within the spirit and letter of the Durban Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa, as adopted by the Assembly of the African Union in July 2002. The presence of this Observer Mission constitutes an unequivocal commitment of the African Union to contribute to the promotion and strengthening of democracy and the rule of law on our Continent.
6. The purpose of the Mission was to make an objective, independent and impartial observation of the 29 March, 2012 National Assembly elections.

B. PRE-ELECTION ACTIVITIES

1. In accordance with the African Union Guidelines for Election Observation and Monitoring, the Mission met and consulted with various Stakeholders involved in the electoral process. These included representatives of Gambian Political Parties, the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), The Gambia Press Union (GPU), and the Civil Society Organization's Coalition on Elections (CSOE).
2. More particularly, Members of the AU Observer Mission attended on 27 March, 2012 a briefing organized by the IEC for International and Domestic Observers during which they were updated on the constitutional and legal framework governing elections in The Gambia; the level of preparedness of the IEC; and the security situation in the country ahead of the polls. The IEC also presented a demonstration of the voting and counting procedures.
3. The African Union Mission deployed eleven (11) teams to various locations throughout the country. The teams were deployed to the following Regions: Banjul, Western, North Bank, Central River and Lower River.
4. In light of these consultations and the findings of the teams, the African Union Observer Mission to the 29 March, 2012 National Assembly Elections in the Republic of The Gambia, makes the following observations and recommendations:

C. OBSERVATIONS

I. General Observations

- the electoral process was generally peaceful and held in accordance with the Constitution and the electoral laws of the Republic of The Gambia;
- the campaign was on the whole conducted peacefully, however there were reported cases of intimidation;
- there were no significant acts of violence reported in the run up to the elections;
- the gross imbalance in the financial and material capability of the candidates may have resulted in the lack of adequate visibility of the National Reconciliation Party (NRP) and the Independent Candidates;

- the non-participation in the elections by six opposition parties highlights the need for increased dialogue among political stakeholders;
- the participation of female candidates in the National Assembly elections was minimal, as there were only five women among the 74 candidates that contested in the elections;
- the preparedness of the IEC and the professional conduct of election personnel on election day is commendable;
- the counting and tallying of the votes at the polling stations immediately at the close of voting is remarkable and it contributed to the transparency of the process;
- the IEC made provision for the collection of gender aggregated data of voters on election day;
- some personnel recruited and deployed by the IEC on election duty were unable to vote in the National Assembly elections because they were deployed outside their constituencies;
- media coverage of the National Assembly elections was observed as minimal.

II. Election Day

The AU observer teams visited a total of 117 polling stations across the regions where they were deployed, and their observations are as follows:

Opening of the poll

- most polling stations opened on time;
- polling officials and party/ candidate representatives were in place and on time for the opening of the polling stations.

Polling stations and balloting materials

- most polling stations were located in public institutions, especially schools and health centres that were easily accessible. A few were, however, found in police barracks, places of worship and market squares;

- the stations were located in open spaces that allowed for an easy flow of voters;
- polling materials were delivered in good time and generally in sufficient quantities;
- the indelible ink which was used in all polling stations was of good quality;
- the availability of polling compartments and the positioning of the polling drums adequately ensured the secrecy of the vote;
- polling compartments in some polling stations were poorly lit, making it difficult for voters to identify the drums for their candidates;
- issuance of voters' lists to representatives of candidates made the process inclusive and more transparent.

Election personnel

- women and youth were well represented as electoral officials;
- in general, the polling staff handled the voting process in an efficient and transparent manner.

Voter turnout

- In comparison with the Presidential elections that recorded 82.6% voter turnout, there was a significant drop in the turnout of voters during the National Assembly elections that recorded less than 50% turnout;
- there was a good turnout of female voters in many of the stations visited.

Independent observers, Party Agents and Security Personnel

- Domestic Observers, particularly from the Civil Society Organizations Coalition on Elections (CSOCE) were present in the majority of polling stations;
- election experts from the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) and NGOs from Chad and Cote d'Ivoire were also present at some polling stations;
- agents of the candidates were present in most polling stations;
- security personnel were present in all polling stations; however, their presence was intrusive in some polling stations;

- the presence of traditional chiefs and village heads was also observed at some polling stations and in some cases, they interfered with the process;
- media coverage on the whole was timid.

Voting and counting

- the voting process was generally orderly and peaceful;
- there were no overt acts of intimidation or coercion during the voting;
- persons with disabilities, the elderly as well as pregnant and nursing mothers were given preferential treatment, and where necessary, assisted to vote;
- most voters were in possession of voters' cards that made the process of identification of voters easy and effective;
- the IEC made provision for an individual to assist voters identify their allocated polling stations within polling centres;
- the voting system including the use of ballot tokens and drums proved to be user-friendly with minimal records of invalid ballots;
- the counting and tallying of votes was conducted at the polling stations in a transparent manner and the results were announced and posted at each polling station before the transfer of voting materials to the collation centres.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned, the AU Observer Mission noted the following shortcomings:

- voter's rolls were not posted in polling stations;
- the voters' rolls were not updated in the months between the Presidential and National Assembly elections thus, citizens who attained the voting age during this period were not able to vote;
- there were no clear directions to the location of polling centres by the IEC.

D. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the observations and findings made by its different teams, the African Union Election Observer Mission to the 29 March, 2012 National Assembly elections in the Republic of The Gambia makes the following recommendations:

- *The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) should:*
 - make provision for clear directions to polling centres and also ensure that polling stations within polling centres are clearly marked for easy identification;
 - develop mechanisms for dialogue among electoral stakeholders;
 - make provision to recruit and deploy election personnel in their respective constituencies during National Assembly elections to ensure that they are able to exercise their franchise to elect their representatives;
 - conduct sensitization programmes for security agencies on their roles in the electoral process.
- *National Council of Civic Education (NCCE) should:*
 - in collaboration with all stakeholders, undertake civic education to enlighten the public on the importance of the National Assembly as an arm of the Government;
- *The National Assembly should consider:*
 - revisiting the law on the public financing of political parties and the use of public resources to ensure a level playing field for all political competitors;
 - initiating reforms in the political and electoral system that would encourage and promote the participation of women in governance in The Gambia;
 - reforms of the current legal framework to mandate the IEC to post the lists of voters in their respective polling stations before the polling day in line with international best practice;
 - reforms to also address the need for continuous registration of voters and update of the voters' rolls.

E. CONCLUSION

In view of the aforementioned, the AU Observer Mission notes that the 29 March, 2012 National Assembly elections in the Republic of The Gambia were conducted in accordance with the legal and constitutional framework of The Gambia; the Durban Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa, as adopted by the Assembly of the African Union in July 2002.

The AU Observer Mission consequently concludes that the 29 March, 2012 National Assembly Elections in the Republic of The Gambia were conducted in a manner that the results are a true reflection of the will of the sovereign people of The Gambia.

The African Union Mission wishes to acclaim and congratulate the people of the Republic of The Gambia, Political Parties and the Candidates for their political maturity, as well as the IEC, the Security Agencies and all the Stakeholders involved in the current electoral process, for the peaceful conduct of the 29 March, 2012 National Assembly Elections.

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