

# **The Gambia Presidential Election**

18 October 2001

The Report of the  
Commonwealth Observer Group



COMMONWEALTH SECRETARIAT



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Commonwealth Secretariat  
Marlborough House  
Pall Mall  
London SW1Y 5HX  
United Kingdom

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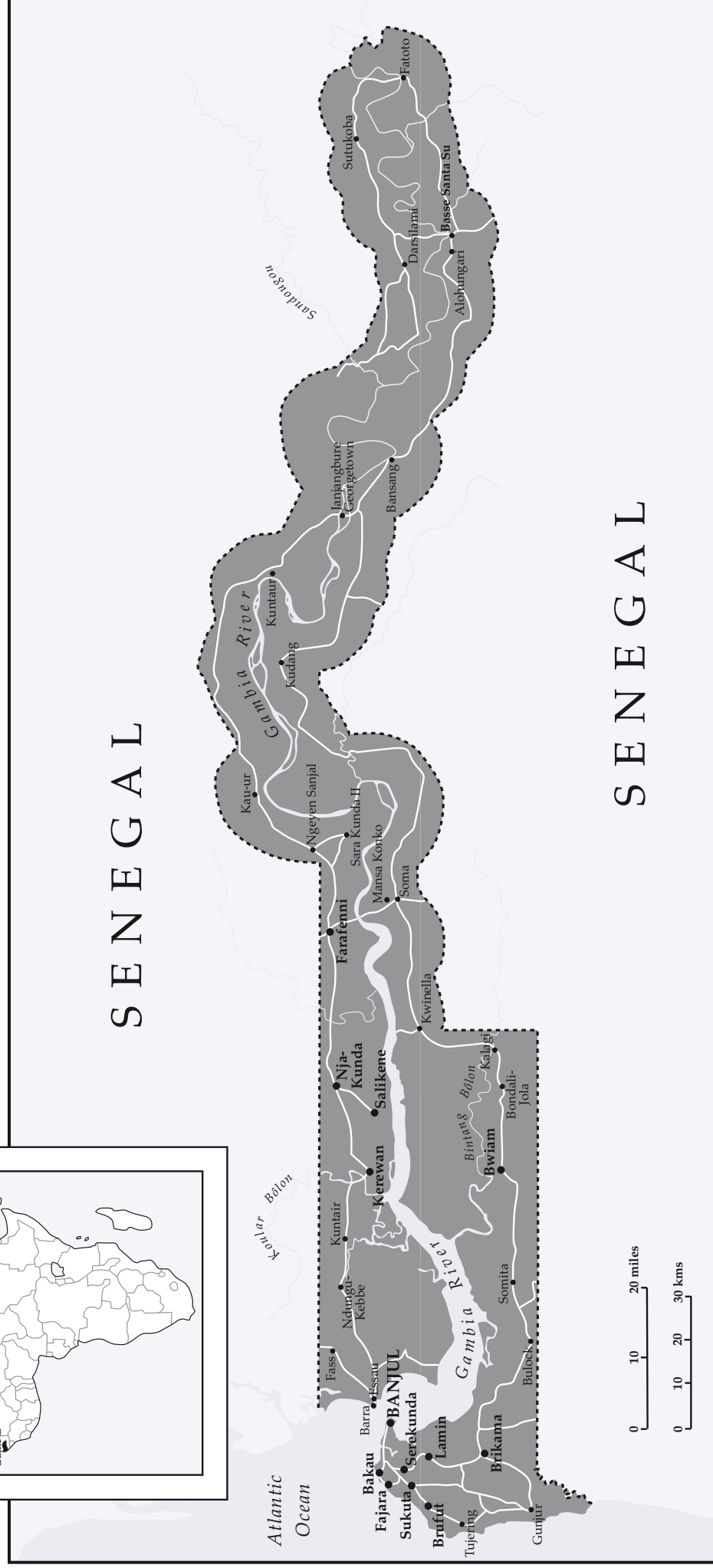
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# Map of The Gambia



# Letter of Transmittal

## **COMMONWEALTH OBSERVER GROUP The Gambia Presidential Election, 18 October 2001**

Kairaba Beach Hotel, Kololi, The Gambia

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Office Tel: +220 462832  
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21 October 2001

*Dear Secretary General,*

It has been a privilege to have been invited by you to observe the Presidential Election in The Gambia. It has been a pleasure working with such a skilled and balanced team of Observers, comprising two election commissioners, two parliamentarians, an election expert and an expert in legal and judicial matters, and such a professional and effective Commonwealth Secretariat Staff Support Team.

The Observer Group has completed its work. It is an honour to attach our report.

We hope that the people of the Republic of The Gambia will continue to strengthen their democracy. We trust that you will support them in this regard.

Yours sincerely

**Hon P.A. Sangre, MP**  
Chairperson

HE Rt Hon Don McKinnon  
Commonwealth Secretary-General  
Marlborough House  
Pall Mall  
London SW1Y 5HX



Dr Brigalia Bam

Dr Karen Brewer

Hon. Mr Mario Galea, MP

Mr David Kangah

Ms Judy Thompson

*This Observer Group Report was signed by the members of the Group. In this electronic version, their signatures ☐ have been removed.*☐



**THE COMMONWEALTH OBSERVER GROUP . . .** (from left to right) Karen Brewer, David Kangah, Brigalia Bam, P A Sangma (Chairperson), Judy Thompson, Mario Galea

# Introduction

## Invitation

On 10 July 2001 the Chairperson of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) in The Gambia invited the Commonwealth Secretary-General to establish a Commonwealth Observer Group for the 2001 presidential election.

In line with established practice the Secretary-General sent an Assessment Mission to The Gambia, with two objectives: to determine whether the political parties and others would welcome the presence of Commonwealth Observers, and to ensure that the Observers would have access to polling stations and counting centres and that they would be free to pursue their mandate.

The Assessment Mission visited The Gambia from 18 to 23 August 2001 and concluded that there was broad support for the presence of such a Group and that the Group would be able to pursue its mandate. The Secretary-General decided to constitute an Observer Group of four Observers, supported by three Commonwealth Secretariat staff, and informed the Chairperson of the IEC, the Government of The Gambia and Commonwealth governments accordingly. Subsequently, two further Observers were included in the Group. (The composition of the Commonwealth Observer Group is shown at Annex I.) A press release was issued in London on Monday, 8 October 2001.

## Terms of Reference for the Commonwealth Observer Group

The terms of reference of the Group, as set out by the Secretary-General in his formal letter of invitation, were as follows:

*The Group is established by the Commonwealth Secretary-General at the request of the Chairman of the Independent Electoral Commission of The Gambia. It is to observe relevant aspects of the organisation and conduct of the Presidential Election in accordance with the laws of The Gambia. It is to consider the various factors impinging on the credibility of the electoral process as a whole and to determine in its own judgement whether the conditions exist for a free expression of will by the electors and if the results of the elections reflect the wishes of the people.*

*The Group is to act impartially and independently. It has no executive role; its function is not to supervise but to observe the process as a whole and to form a judgement accordingly. It would also be free to propose to the authorities concerned such action on institutional, procedural and other matters as would assist the holding of such elections.*

*The Group is to submit its report to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, who will forward it to the Government of The Gambia, the Independent Electoral Commission of The Gambia, the leadership of the political parties taking part in the elections and thereafter to all Commonwealth Governments.*

## Activities of the Group

One member of the Group, Mr David Kangah, accompanied by a member of the Commonwealth Secretariat staff support team, Dr Jackie Dugard, formed an 'Advance Group' which began its work in The Gambia nine days before the arrival of the Main Group. The Advance Group met with the IEC on several occasions. The rest of the Group assembled in The Gambia, on 11 October 2001. After being briefed by the Advance Group, an Arrival Statement was issued at a press conference on Friday, 12 October (see *Annex II*). The entire group attended several political rallies.

From 12 to 15 October the Group was briefed by representatives of political parties, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), media organisations and Heads of Commonwealth High Commissions. (A schedule of engagements is at *Annex III*.) On Monday, 15 October we all attended a full day's briefing organised by the IEC at the Kairaba Beach Hotel, at which other international observers were present. The following day, those Observers who had not been deployed, attended the second day of the IEC's two-day programme, comprising additional briefings with political parties and the media.

On Tuesday, 16 October the Observers and Secretariat staff support team members deployed in four teams of two persons (see *Annex IV*). Team One, which comprised the Chairperson and Staff Leader, was based at the Kairaba Beach Hotel and covered the Kanifing Division. Team Four, which comprised the Advance Group (an Observer and a Secretariat staff support team member), was based at the Kairaba Beach Hotel and covered the Brikama area in the Western Division. Team Two, which comprised two Observers, was based at the eastern end of the country, at Basse Santa Su, and covered the Upper River Division. Team Three, which comprised two Observers, was based at Sindola, and covered western parts of the Western Division and various parts of the Lower River Division.

Prior to the day of polling the teams met with local IEC staff, party officials, divisional commissioners and police officials. We travelled extensively, made ourselves visible, spoke with electors and saw the very end of the campaign. We were pleased to note that our presence was widely known and appreciated. On the polling day itself – Thursday, 18 October – the teams visited as many polling stations as possible, including several in the most remote areas. Altogether the teams observed voting at 86 polling stations, in four of the seven Administrative Districts.<sup>1</sup> The Group was given access to all parts of the voting process: the opening of the polls, the voting, the polling station closures, the transfer and security of the ballot drums, the counting and the announcement of the final result. The teams saw the 'opening' at six polling stations and 'closing' at seven polling stations and followed the sealed ballot drums from the polling stations to four counting centres. Members of the Group also made a point of speaking with voters, party agents and election officials. On the day of polling the Observers made use of observation notes and checklists, prepared by the Secretariat, to record their observations (see *Annex V*).

We were present at four of the 28 counting centres (Independence Stadium Counting and Collation Centre in Kanifing Administrative Area, Brikama

<sup>1</sup> The four Administrative Divisions where we observed voting were: Kanifing, Western Division, Lower River Division and Upper River Division.

Gambia College Counting and Collation Centre in Brikama Administrative Area, Bwiam Fatima Senior Secondary School Counting Centre in Foni Bondali and Foni Kansala Administrative Area, and Basse Community Centre Counting and Collation Centre in Basse Administrative Area). Members of the Group were made to feel welcome wherever we went and appreciation was expressed for the Commonwealth's role.

On Friday, 19 October all four teams reassembled at the Kairaba Beach Hotel to prepare our Report. The following day, after a debriefing session, we began the process of writing our Report. On the basis of our reports during deployment, the Chairperson issued an Interim Statement at 2 p.m. on 19 October 2001 (see *Annex VI*). We departed from The Gambia on the evening of 22 October. (The Departure Statement issued is shown at *Annex VII*.)

CHAPTER 1

Political Background

Historical Overview

The territory that is now The Gambia came under British rule towards the end of the 19th century. The Gambia gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1965 under the leadership of Sir Dawda Jawara and his People’s Progressive Party (PPP) and became a republic in 1970 with Sir Dawda as executive President. Sir Dawda won successive elections and survived a first coup attempt in 1981 by invoking a defence pact with Senegal. He continued to rule The Gambia until 1994 when he was overthrown in a bloodless military coup led by Lt Yahya Jammeh.

The present Government of President Jammeh was elected to office on 26 September 1996. It succeeded a transitional military government, also led by the then Lt Jammeh following his overthrow of the elected Government of Sir Dawda Jawara in a coup on 22 July 1994. On assuming power the five-man Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council (AFPRC) of Lt Jammeh suspended the Constitution and banned all political activities. In October 1994, it published a timetable for return to civil rule in 1998. However, under strong international and local pressure, the transition period was shortened and the termination date was moved forward to 1996. A Constitutional Review Commission was set up in April 1996 and although the draft document was heavily criticised for favouring the possible political ambitions of Lt Jammeh, it was endorsed in a national referendum on 8 August 1996, finally lifting the ban on political activity.

A presidential election took place the following month, with only one serious candidate, Ousainou Darboe, leader of the United Democratic Party (UDP), standing against Chairman Jammeh, who resigned his commission shortly before the election. Garnering 55.6 per cent of the national vote, Yahya Jammeh’s election victory was deemed dubious by observers, who considered the poll neither free nor fair. Nevertheless, he was declared the civilian President of The Gambia in October 1996, and has ruled since.

Commonwealth Involvement

The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group on the Harare Declaration (CMAG) was established as a mechanism for implementation of measures set out in the Millbrook Action Programme adopted by Commonwealth Heads of Government in 1995. The first countries that came under its mandate were The Gambia, along with Nigeria and Sierra Leone, then the only Commonwealth countries under military rule.

At their meeting in Durban, South Africa, in November 1999, Commonwealth Heads of Government, in their Communiqué “expressed concern at the continued existence of the Schedule to Decree No. 89, which proscribes the political activities of certain political parties and individuals in The Gambia and urged its repeal. They welcomed an invitation extended by

.....  
*At their meeting in London  
on 3-4 September 2001,  
CMAG ministers welcomed  
the repeal of the Schedule to  
Decree No. 89*  
.....



the President of The Gambia for CMAG to visit that country and assess first-hand The Gambia's compliance with the Harare Principles. They requested the Secretary-General to continue the provision of technical assistance to The Gambia to consolidate democratic processes and institutions."

The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group's continuing concerns in The Gambia have focused on the creation of a more tolerant and inclusive political environment, especially through the repeal of the Schedule to Decree No. 89. The Commonwealth's commitment to support the process of democratisation in The Gambia and specifically to bring about the repeal of the Schedule to Decree No. 89 was confirmed at CMAG's Thirteenth Meeting in London on 2 May 2000 and at its Fourteenth Meeting in New York on 15 September 2000.

A CMAG Assessment Mission visited The Gambia from 19 to 22 November 2000. The Mission held discussions with President Jammeh and senior members of his government, leaders of political parties, Commonwealth High Commissioners, NGOs, and the media. The Mission received reports of various human rights abuses, including arbitrary arrests, harassment and detention without trial of opposition politicians, journalists, students and other individuals, as well as the killing of 12 students by security forces during a protest march in Banjul on 10 April 2000. The Mission was firmly assured by the President of his intention to repeal the Schedule to Decree No. 89.

This intention was reiterated when the Commonwealth Secretary-General visited The Gambia from 19 to 21 February 2001 and held talks with President Jammeh and senior government officials, including the Chief Justice and the Attorney-General, as well as the Independent Electoral Commission, and members of the National Assembly.

At its Fifteenth Meeting in London on 19-20 March 2001, CMAG received the Report from its Mission to The Gambia, and a report by the Commonwealth Secretary-General on his meetings with President Jammeh and others in Banjul. Ministers reiterated the Commonwealth's continued concern over the process of democratisation in The Gambia and urged the Government of The Gambia to take urgent steps for the repeal of the Schedule to Decree No. 89, well before the forthcoming parliamentary and presidential elections.

On 22 July 2001 President Jammeh announced the repeal of the Schedule to Decree No. 89. The President was quoted as saying that he wished to see the creation of a political environment in which everyone is "free to choose and support anyone they want". The repeal of the decree was ratified by the National Assembly on 31 July 2001 and gazetted on 8 August 2001. The repeal came approximately six weeks before nominations for the presidential election, on 18 September 2001.

At their meeting in London on 3-4 September 2001, CMAG ministers welcomed the repeal of the Schedule to Decree No. 89. The Group, however, noted that it remained important that the Government of The Gambia take further measures to create an environment in which all political parties and individuals could freely take part in the political process. The Group also recommended that the Secretary-General be requested to continue to monitor the situation in The Gambia, and to provide technical assistance to strengthen democratic processes and institutions.

## CHAPTER 2

---

# The Electoral Framework and Preparations for the Election

### Legal and Constitutional Framework

The Constitution of the Republic of The Gambia provides that every citizen of The Gambia who is 18 years or over and of sound mind may vote. The vote is by secret ballot. The Constitution provides for the setting up of an Independent Electoral Commission and the procedures for appointments of members of the Commission (Article 42). The Chair and members are appointed by the President in consultation with the Judicial Services Commission and the Public Services Commission. Earlier this year the Chairperson of the IEC, Bishop Solomon Telewa Johnson, was dismissed and Gabriel Roberts appointed in his place. Mr Roberts was the Chairperson of the IEC during the last presidential election, held in 1996.

The IEC is responsible for the conduct and supervision of the registration of voters for all public elections as well as the supervision of such elections, the registration of political parties and ensuring that the date, time and place of the election are determined in accordance with the law and that these are publicised (Article 44 of the Constitution).

The Elections Decree of 1996 (Decree No. 78) is the main electoral law, supplemented by the Elections (Amendment) Act of 3 July 2001. The electoral law covers the method of registration of voters, registration and conduct of political parties, nominations of candidates, the conduct of election campaigns, the conduct of elections at polling stations and the counting of votes as well as election petitions.

The Constitution provides for the election of the President every five years and that an election must be held three months preceding the expiry of the incumbent's term of office. If, on the first ballot, no one candidate receives more than 50 per cent of the vote, a second round takes place within 14 days.

### The Independent Electoral Commission

#### Establishment and Functions

In accordance with Article 42 of the Constitution, the IEC is composed of a Chair and four other members, one of whom is elected Vice-Chair. The members are appointed for an initial term of seven years and may be reappointed for one further term. There is an arrangement for three of the members to be initially appointed for a shorter period to ensure continuity. The IEC's independence is constitutionally guaranteed and, in the exercise of its functions, the Commission should not be subject to the direction or control of any other person or authority.

There is a current proposal to change the status of the IEC from a permanent body into an *ad hoc* body that would be created 12 months or "such shorter period as may be prescribed by the National Assembly for other elections" before an election is due. This change requires an Amendment to



the Constitution, which in turn requires a referendum, which will be held in November 2001.

In the opinion of the Group, the IEC should remain a permanent body and should be appropriately empowered to protect and promote democracy particularly in the period between elections by undertaking such responsibilities as are currently enshrined in the Constitution. This would ensure cost-effectiveness, continuity, professionalism, independence and stability.

## Structure

The Commission has a small secretariat of permanent staff. At the head office in Latrikunda there is an Administrative Secretary and two Directors, one for Operations and the other in charge of Training, Communications and Public Affairs. Each of the seven Administrative Divisions has a Regional Electoral Officer and an Assistant. The Commission does not maintain a permanent presence beyond this level. Members of the Commission have responsibility for specific regions. The Chair is the Chief Executive for the day-to-day administration of the Commission.

## Voter Registration

Article 43 of the Constitution assigns the IEC the responsibility for registering qualified Gambian citizens to participate in public elections. Article 11(1) of the Elections Decree of 1996 (Decree No. 78) directs the Commission to prepare, compile and maintain a Register of Voters for each constituency and a Register of Gambian registered voters in foreign countries.

The IEC carried out a fresh registration exercise between April and June this year at all 811 polling stations. Applicants for registration were required to produce a National Identity Card issued by the Immigration Department or a birth certificate or have five elders certify their Gambian citizenship. Following the registration exercise every registered voter was issued with a Voting Card with a polling station number on it. On the day of polling registered voters returned to vote at the same station they registered at.

During August the provisional Register lists were scrutinised by the public for errors and submitted to designated Revising Courts to receive petitions and effect insertions and deletions. The IEC then computerised the registration data, along with the changes the courts made. The final Register lists, with 509,301 registered voters, were printed and distributed to polling stations only a few days before polling day. This late distribution meant that some party agents had not received the lists by the day of polling.

In the days before the poll, a number of issues relating to the Register of Voters were raised by the opposition political parties at one of the briefing sessions organised by the IEC. A specific objection was the IEC's decision to allow voters with Voting Cards to vote even if their names were not in the Register. Responding to this concern, on 16 October, the IEC released the following statement: "This notice is to inform all prospective voters at the Presidential Election on Thursday 18 October 2001 that only those whose names appear in the final Register of Voters will be allowed to vote." The

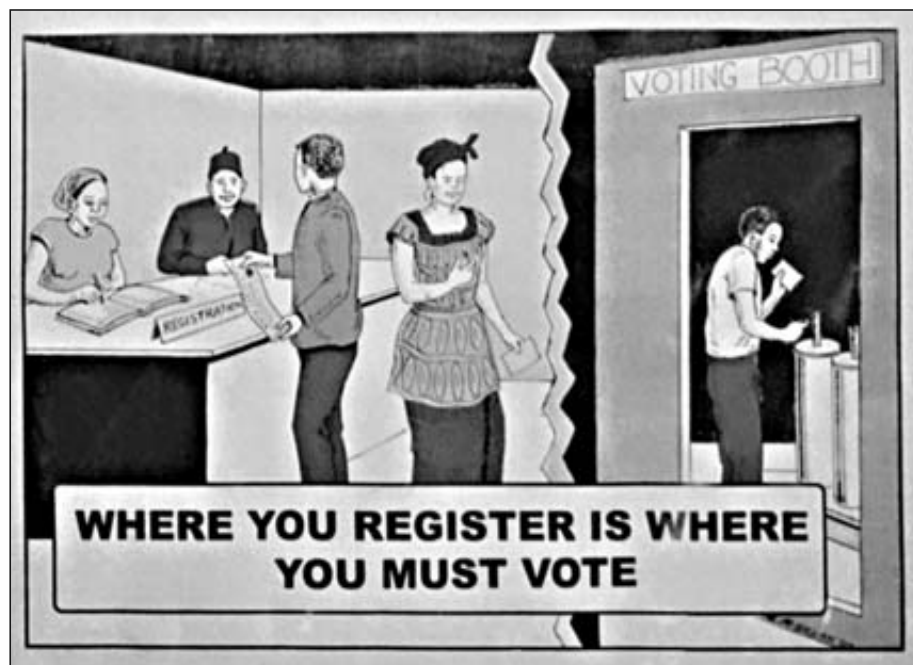
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by undertaking such  
responsibilities as are  
currently enshrined in the  
Constitution*  
.....

following day (one day before the poll), a further clarification was made by the IEC, instructing agents to allow the original registration counterfoils to be used to verify Voting Cards in cases where people's names did not appear on the Register. This additional modification was made because the IEC recognised that there was a margin of error in the Register and did not want to disenfranchise voters.

## Voter Education

Basic and relatively far-reaching voter education (all funded by USAID) was undertaken by the IEC and NGOs such as the Framework for Peace, Reconciliation and Democracy, the African Centre for Democracy and Human

**VOTER EDUCATION . . .** poster urging voters to vote where they registered



Rights Studies and the local branches of Amnesty International and Action Aid between August and October 2001. Television, radio, print media and billboards were used to explain how and where to vote, the secrecy of the ballot and the counting procedure. Although voter education was fairly widespread, the impact was impaired by changing procedures and problems with access to information.

## Security

Article 129 of the Elections Decree of 1996 (Decree No. 78) provides that the Inspector-General of Police shall on the request of the IEC assign to it such number of police officers as the Commission may require during the period of the election. The assigned police officers serve the Commission until seven days after the declaration of the election results. In compliance with this provision, the army, while not normally participating in the security of the elections process, should be on the alert to move in to take care of situations that are beyond the capacity of the police.

Of crucial importance to the security of the ballot tokens is the requirement that Presiding Officers and party agents travel in the vehicle with the ballot drums from the polling stations to the counting stations.

At a security briefing organised by the IEC, security chiefs told Observers that during transit from polling stations to counting stations, the ballot drums would be escorted by security vehicles – one in front and the other at the rear of the vehicle carrying the drums, election officials and party agents. It should be noted that in the areas we observed this procedure was not followed.

## **Training and Materials**

Training of key trainers was undertaken by the IEC during September 2001.

A subsequent one-day training session was held in each of the seven Administrative Divisions for successful applicants for the positions of Presiding Officer, Assistant Presiding Officer and Polling Officer; the session for Presiding and Assistant Presiding Officers was held on Saturday, 13 October, and the session for Polling Officers was held the following day. As part of the recruitment process, the applicants were screened by the security services. The one-day training exercise had as its objectives:

- to sensitise the election officials about the critical and sensitive nature of their work; and
- to familiarise them with the law and the procedures of voting and counting of the ballots.

Some of the trainers suggested that one day was insufficient, but they were quick to add that the majority of the trainees had officiated at past elections and probably did not need an intensive training simulation exercise. At the end of the training sessions the trainers were given copies of a *Handbook for Polling Officials*.

## **Presidential Candidates**

Nominations for presidential candidates were conducted by the Independent Electoral Commission on 18 September 2001. Five presidential candidates were successfully nominated:

- (1) The Hon Hamat Bah for the National Reconciliation Party (NRP);
- (2) Mr Ousainou Darboe for the United Democratic Party (UDP) led coalition;
- (3) Mr Sherriff Mustapha Dibba for the National Convention Party, NCP;
- (4) President Alhaji Yahya A J J Jammeh for the Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC); and
- (5) Mr Sidia Jatta for the People's Democratic Organisation for Independence and Socialism (PDOIS).

## Election Observers

Ninety Observers were accredited by the IEC, as follows:

### *International Observers*

British High Commission	10 delegates
Commonwealth	9 delegates
US Embassy	4 delegates
European Commission	1 delegate
Nigeria High Commission	3 delegates
Sierra Leone High Commission	3 delegates
Organisation of African Unity	5 delegates
Economic Community of West African States	4 delegates
World Conference of Mayors	8 delegates
International Society for Human Rights	9 delegates
National Committee for Elections – Guinea-Bissau	2 delegates

(58 international Observers)

### *Domestic Observers*

Coalition for Human Rights Defenders	7 delegates
Gambia Workers Confederation	3 delegates
Transparency International (Gambia)	9 delegates
National Youth Council	12 delegates
Consortium of Christian Youth Organisations	1 delegate

(32 domestic Observers)

During the IEC's two-day briefing for observers (15 to 16 October), procedures of voter registration, voting and counting, and security arrangements were explained. Accredited Observers were issued with photo identification cards, elections regulations and related documents, as well as 'Guidelines for Accredited Observers or Monitors for the Presidential Elections 2001'.

In the course of our activities and work we co-operated closely with other observer groups.

## CHAPTER 3

# The Campaign and the News Media

## The Campaign

When we arrived in The Gambia the election campaign was well under way but we were still able to attend several rallies. On the whole rallies were peaceful and orderly, with only a few reported skirmishes across the country. One incident that should be singled out was the killing of a youth in Talliding (greater-Banjul area) by the security forces during a clash between the APRC and UDP on the eve of the close of the campaign, on 15 October 2001.

A number of questionable and inflammatory public statements were made during the campaign period, 26 September to 16 October 2001. For example, the Deputy Inspector-General of Police, Mr Jai Sowe, attracted criticism for announcing to the press that the “UDP was so far the only party causing trouble and mostly against APRC supporters” (*Daily Observer*, 3 October 2001). During a rally in Brikama on Friday, 12 October, President Jammeh was reported as



### POLITICAL PARTY RALLIES . . .

Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC) rally (*above*), and United Democratic Party (UDP) coalition rally (*left*)



warning members of the opposition who carried dangerous weapons during and after the election that they would be “shot to death” (*The Independent*, 15-18 October 2001). And, three days before the election, President Jammeh told UDP supporters in Brikama that he would “shower them with difficult times” if he was re-elected to power, and that opposition supporters would be made to pay for using government taps, boreholes and government hospitals (*The Point*, 15 October 2001).

It should be noted that The Gambia’s electoral laws make no provision for the funding of political parties and their campaigns, a factor that strongly influenced the election campaign. As incumbent, the APRC’s President Jammeh had a clear advantage by virtue of access to resources, including the use of government vehicles and military equipment, not to mention funds. During the campaign President Jammeh was seen around the country travelling in long motorcades – backed up by a heavy military presence including rocket launchers – throwing T-shirts to the assembled crowds. There were also widespread reports alleging that the President distributed money to the crowds at such rallies.

Apart from billboards and banners advertising President Jammeh and a few yellow flags advertising Ousainou Darboe’s UDP, there was a noticeable absence of the posters and advertisements usually seen during election campaigns.

## The News Media

The public media in The Gambia is represented by the Gambian Radio and Television Services (GRTS), which provides the only domestic television station and the only countrywide radio service, both seen as being pro-Government. Private radio stations that provide news coverage include Radio 1 FM, Radio Sud and Citizen FM. These stations, although considered to be independent and relatively objective, do not have much coverage outside the greater-Banjul area. The main private newspapers are the *Daily Observer*, which is seen as pro-Government, and *The Point* and *The Independent*, which

**PRESIDENTIAL RALLY . . .**  
President Jammeh throws  
T-shirts into the crowd



are both perceived to be more objective. The high rate of illiteracy (70 per cent), the fact that all newspapers are written in English and have a limited distribution, combined with the high cost of television sets, means that radio is the most important medium in The Gambia. Radio has the added advantage of transmitting in all local languages. Only GRTS's services cover the entire country, so the majority of Gambian citizens are only exposed to pro-Government media.

For the presidential election the public media was governed by GRTS's 'internal guideline for the 2001 presidential election'. In terms of the guideline, each political party was allocated five minutes' airtime a day and 30 minutes' airtime every five days for free. Although on the whole most party representatives were satisfied with the fairness of GRTS coverage, some commented that without an Independent Media Commission it was difficult to enforce the guidelines. Others pointed to the fact that, over and above the free airtime, the ruling party was able to pay for expensive advertisements, which they were not able to afford.

The private media, which was not covered by the GRTS internal guideline, held a workshop on Saturday, 6 October 2001 in order to establish a self-regulating Code of Conduct.

## CHAPTER 4

# The Poll and Count

### The Poll

#### Method of Voting

The Gambia follows an unusual voting method, using marbles – called ballot tokens – which are inserted by the voter into a hole in a spout attached to the ballot drum of their choice. The five ballot drums for this election were painted in the colours of the five political parties<sup>2</sup> and photos of presidential candidates along with the name of the party were pasted on the drums. A bell attached to the bottom of the spout rings when the voter inserts the token into the hole. This signifies to the Presiding Officer and party agents that the voter has voted. Sand is placed at the bottom of the drum to absorb the sound as the token hits the bottom.

#### Polling Stations

There were 811 polling stations across the country. In many cases people had to walk long distances in the heat to the polling stations, and should be commended for turning out in large numbers. Throughout the country

**VERIFICATION OF IDENTITY . . .**  
voters having their identification  
checked prior to voting



thousands of Gambian citizens queued and voted peacefully. The large turnout of women was impressive. In many stations three queues were established: one for men, one for women, and another for pregnant women, women with babies, elderly and disabled persons. In some places the Red Cross played a part in bringing the latter to the polling stations.

The layout of the polling stations was generally adequate although many, especially those in rural areas, lacked basic facilities. In most of the rural areas a tree provided the only cover for the polling staff, with voters having to queue

<sup>2</sup> The five colours were as follows: blue for Hamat Bah's NRP, yellow for Ousainou Darboe's UDP coalition, white for Sherriff Mustapha Dibba's NCP, green for President Jammeh's APRC party, and brown for Sidia Jatta's PDOIS.



in the sun. Some polling stations lacked communication facilities and had to function in isolation.

The Inspector-General of Police informed Observers during the IEC's briefing at the Kairaba Beach Hotel that there would be two members of the security forces at each polling station, but this was not always the case and led to chaotic situations in some stations.

### **Opening and Closing of Polls**

Most of the stations we observed opened on time. Others opened within an hour of the established time, 7 a.m. Some stations were unable to open at 7 a.m. because, although polling staff and party agents were on site as early as 5 a.m., preparations had to be conducted by torch or candlelight. On the whole the established procedures were followed, although some of the drums were not adequately sealed because the holes in the lid did not align properly or the lids were warped.

Times of closing differed from one station to another. Most stations were able to close on time because the majority of voters had cast their vote by early afternoon. Others had to close late (for instance as late as 10.40 p.m. in Basse Santa Su) because of the long queues of voters still waiting to vote at 4 p.m. The IEC had made it clear that all those who had queued before 4 p.m. would be given the chance to vote.

### **Secrecy of the Ballot**

In the majority of the stations we visited, steps were taken to ensure the secrecy of the ballot. There were instances where secrecy was jeopardised because windows had to be left partially uncovered to ensure adequate daylight in the room. In some polling stations it was possible to discern different bell tones for different drums, which might have been significant enough to determine which drum the token was cast into.

Disabled and visually impaired persons who needed help to vote were allowed to have a person of their choice accompany them to cast their token. Alternatively, they were allowed to ask for help from the Presiding Officer.

### **Atmosphere at Polling Stations**

The general atmosphere at the polling stations was peaceful with different party agents co-operating with each other. During the poll we did not encounter any harassment of voters. It was evident that the ruling party had more resources, with a party agent present at every polling station. This was not always the case with the other parties, which did not have agents at every polling station, and in many cases agents did not have copies of the Register.

### **Polling Staff**

In various polling stations the electoral staff consisted of the Presiding Officer, an Assistant Presiding Officer and a Polling Agent. This appeared to be the case across polling stations, irrespective of the number of voters registered and may be one of the reasons why in some polling stations nearly all the voters had voted by mid-day while at other polling stations long queues persisted even after 4 p.m.

**WAITING TO VOTE . . .**  
voters in the queue at a  
polling station



The polling staff deserve to be commended for their hard work and long hours. In spite of the difficult conditions and the inadequate support services, they did their best to ensure that the people of The Gambia were able to exercise their right to vote.

### **Verification of Voters**

To verify the identity of voters, Polling Officers cross-checked each voter's Voting Card against the Register. In accordance with the IEC's last minute directive, in cases where a voter's name was not found on the Register, Polling Officers checked the name against the original registration counterfoils. Despite the late announcement of this latter instruction, on the day of the poll counterfoils were available at most stations, with a few exceptions. Where it was used, this extra procedure slowed down the process of voting but ensured a higher level of enfranchisement.

### **Reconciliation**

Reconciliation proved to be very difficult in this system of voting. In the main it relies on cross-checking the number of tokens issued to the Presiding Officer against those remaining at the close of poll, and attempting to match that with the names ticked off the Register of the Presiding Officer as well as of each party agent. In many instances party agents' lists did not correlate, forcing them to count and re-count several times. In some cases, these discrepancies had not been resolved by the time the ballot drums were transported to the counting stations.

### **Transportation of Ballot Drums**

The transportation process proved problematic in many areas. There were too few vehicles covering large areas, meaning ballot drums had to be transported to counting stations in relays, which held up the counting process unnecessarily. In many instances vehicles were too small, and in every case we observed the promised security escorts were not provided.

## The Count

### Location of Counting Centres

One issue that recurred often in our discussions with the political parties and the NGOs was the decision to have centralised counting of the ballot tokens. The options were 'on the spot' counting at the 811 polling stations or a 'centralised' count at the seven Administrative Divisions. The IEC consulted with the political parties about the options but no consensus was reached. The IEC then made a compromise decision to have essentially constituency level counting with some shared centres, with 28 centres for 48 constituencies.

### Overview

Members of the Commonwealth Observer Group were present at four counting centres, covering 11 constituencies. Access was not restricted so that in a multiple constituency centre, the Observers could move from one constituency count to another. The political parties were represented at the counting centres by their senior officers in the area.



#### **BALLOT DRUMS . . .**

The Gambia uses unusual ballot drums (*shown in picture*) and ballot tokens instead of ballot boxes and ballot papers

The major problem with the count was the timing and length of the event. The targeted time to start was three hours after the close of the polls. However, the decision in some locations to delay counting until all the drums for a counting centre had arrived meant that counts started very late. The actual counting started as late as 2 a.m. on Friday, meaning that Presiding Officers, political party agents and policemen who had already put in a long day were forced to sit and wait for hours. Polling stations that processed voters as late as 10.30 p.m. delivered the drums after 11 p.m. In at least one case, this meant that the counts at all three constituencies at that centre were delayed. There were also problems with some polling stations being forgotten by the transport persons and the drums were only transported after some hours of waiting.

People waiting for the count were very patient, but these long delays ought not to have occurred. A better organisation of resources would have been to

the benefit of all involved. After this wait, in some cases there was confusion about who was authorised to remain for the count and to us as Observers it was sometimes difficult to identify authorised personnel as none had name badges or other means of identifying them.

## Procedures

The unique balloting system required special counting equipment including sieves to remove the sand in the ballot drums and counting trays that held 200 or 500 tokens. The staff at each constituency count varied from one recorder and one counter to one recorder and four counters. The staffing level affected the speed of the count.

The procedures were reasonably straightforward and transparent, with the counting trays being displayed at each stage and the result of each count announced. However, it was a very slow process, taking from 15 to 30 minutes to process one polling station count.

Unlike the Presiding Officers, who followed the same procedures in each polling station, the Counting Officers did not always have a consistent approach to the count. There was some confusion over procedures to be followed in certain constituencies.

In some cases there was no reconciliation process at the time of the count at all and the total number of tokens from polling stations (those counted and those unused) were not always checked against the number of actual voters recorded, although this process may have taken place after the count. In one centre visited by Observers, a political party agent insisted that this check take place.

When the count for each drum was complete, the tokens were returned to the drum, or in at least one count, the tokens from all the drums for one candidate were placed together in one drum. The ballot drums were meant to be resealed after the count but in the event this was not done after the counting for each polling station was completed. Furthermore, the party agents did not sign the record of the results after each polling station was counted to ensure that the numbers could not be changed. These shortcomings suggest that if a re-count was ordered, or a problem arose with reconciliation, it would be impossible to re-count and check.

Many of the problems encountered in the counting process – for example the time-consuming transportation of ballot drums, the lateness of the start of the count and the length of the count – could have been avoided if the count had taken place at each polling station instead of more centrally, as occurred. On the spot counting would also mean that counting could be done in daylight, dispelling any concerns about transparency. In addition, on the spot counting would circumvent the need for the transportation of ballot drums, a process that is often perceived as an opportunity for fraud. Finally, in our estimation, and contrary to arguments given for centralised counting, the security and staffing arrangements at polling stations were adequate enough to do a count at the same site.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

## Conclusions

Our observation of the election afforded us the opportunity to contribute to the strengthening of democracy in The Gambia. The election is a credit to the people of The Gambia. The registered voters were eager to participate. Long queues emerged at polling stations before the official commencement of voting. Gambians deserve to be congratulated for their determination to exercise the right to choose their President and determine their future. We urge the Commonwealth to do everything possible to help strengthen democracy in The Gambia.

On the day of polling Gambians were able to exercise their vote freely. In the places we observed, and according to the reports we heard from other areas, by and large the atmosphere was peaceful and the secrecy of voting was ensured. The counting was essentially orderly and transparent. We did not discover any organised attempt to defraud either the voting or the counting process.

The people, the political parties and the IEC welcomed the observers. The presence of observers was seen as a deterrent against malpractice. The fact that we travelled extensively and made our presence felt contributed significantly to peaceful voting. We believe that our presence also contributed to the last minute modifications of the verification mechanisms for voting, which added credibility to the electoral process. We received excellent co-operation from the IEC and this facilitated our work.

## Recommendations

### Independent Electoral Commission

- The IEC's current permanent status should be retained in order to ensure cost-effectiveness, continuity, professionalism, independence and stability.
- The IEC's resources should be strengthened.
- There should be written rules and regulations covering all electoral procedures.
- The IEC should plan and execute its functions according to an election calendar.
- Measures to instil public confidence in the Registration process should be initiated. The IEC should complete the vetting of the Register of Voters well in advance of the next election. Where necessary, technical assistance should be provided.

### The Campaign and the News Media

- There should be legislation limiting the expenditure by political parties on their campaign.
- There should be regulations governing the use of state resources by election candidates and their supporters.
- An Independent Media Commission should be established, as provided for in Article 210 of the Constitution, to ensure equitable access to the state-owned media during the campaign period.

### **The Poll and Count**

- The IEC should in future conduct counting at the polling stations in order to instil further confidence in the electoral process.

### **Commonwealth Role**

- The Commonwealth should take further steps to strengthen democracy in The Gambia. This could be done by providing support for institutions that guarantee the separation of powers and strengthen human rights.
- In future the Commonwealth should observe the Registration process.
- The Commonwealth should observe the forthcoming National Assembly elections.

# Acknowledgements

We wish to express our profound appreciation to the people of The Gambia for the warm and hospitable reception afforded to us while we carried out our task. Wherever we went we were deeply moved by the welcome extended to us.

We wish to pay tribute to the Independent Electoral Commission, its Chairperson Mr Gabriel Roberts, and his Commissioners and colleagues, particularly those who worked tirelessly and patiently through the long days and nights at the polling stations and counting centres. We would especially like to thank the IEC's Director of Training, Communications and Public Affairs, Mr Said Usuf, and the Director of Operations, Mr Malleh Sallah, who fulfilled the demands and challenges of the electoral process with commitment and professionalism and were always willing to answer any questions we asked them. We were impressed by the dedication of the police and other security agencies to the democratic process and grateful for the assistance they gave us.

We particularly appreciated the co-operation of the political parties, the members of the press and non-governmental organisations and individuals who found time in the most demanding circumstances to meet us and share their opinions and concerns. We noted the high number of young people working as election officials and party agents, and wish to thank them for their assistance to us and hope that they will continue to participate in such large numbers.

We wish to acknowledge our gratitude to the Commonwealth High Commissioners (Nigeria, Sierra Leone and the United Kingdom) for their co-operation.

We would like to thank the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) for the assistance we received from them. We are very grateful to the Medical Research Council (MRC) for providing accommodation for our Observers in Basse Santa Su.

We reserve our warmest tribute to all the people of The Gambia who, by turning out peacefully on voting day and waiting patiently while the count was in progress, did their country proud and served so ably the cause of democracy.

We also wish to extend our appreciation to Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon for inviting us to participate in this historic mission.

### Composition of the Commonwealth Observer Group

#### **Hon P A Sangma, MP (India – Chairperson)**

Mr P A Sangma is a former Speaker at Lok Sabha. He is General Secretary of the Nationalist Congress Party. He is also a member of the National Commission for the Review of the Working of the Constitution and the National Commission on Population, and Regional Representative of the Asia Region on the Executive Committee of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Previously, he was a teacher, journalist and lawyer. Mr Sangma was elected as a Member of Parliament for seven terms, and has served as Member of Meghalaya Provincial Assembly, Union Deputy Minister, Union Minister of State, Union Cabinet Minister, Chief Minister of Meghalaya, and Leader of the Opposition, Meghalaya.

#### **Dr Brigalia Bam (South Africa)**

Dr Brigalia Bam is the Chairperson of South Africa's Independent Electoral Commission. She was General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) and was a member of the South Africa Human Rights Commission. She serves on several Boards and Trusts. Throughout her career Dr Bam has been involved with women's and youth affairs. She was National Executive Secretary of the World Affiliated YWCA of South Africa and the World Council of Churches in Geneva. She was also Africa Regional Secretary and Co-ordinator of Women's Workers Programme for the International Food and Allied Workers Association. She is presently Chancellor of the University of Port Elizabeth, South Africa.

#### **Dr Karen Brewer (United Kingdom)**

Dr Karen Brewer is Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Magistrates' and Judges' Association. She was brought up in Francophone Africa (People's Republic of the Congo and Senegal) and studied public law at Dakar University, Senegal, completing her LLM in French Public Law at Montpellier University, and her doctorate in international law at the Sorbonne University in 1993. Dr Brewer was the International Relations Officer at the Law Society of England and Wales with particular responsibility for relations with the Far East and the Commonwealth. She has published several articles on legal developments in the Far East and the Commonwealth. She is a member of several Commonwealth NGOs and the Association National des Docteurs en Droit (France).

#### **Hon Mario Galea, MP (Malta)**

Mr Mario Galea is a Member of the Parliament of Malta and the Government Whip. He was first elected to Parliament in 1992 and re-elected in 1998 and has held various positions in the Nationalist Party of Malta. He was Information Secretary of his party and has been a member of the party's monitoring team in various general and local government elections. He is a



member of the Executive Committee of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. In 2000 he was a member of the Commonwealth Observer Group deployed in Zimbabwe to monitor the parliamentary elections.

**Mr David Kangah (Ghana)**

Mr David Azey Adeenze Kangah is the Deputy Chairperson of the Ghana Electoral Commission. He has over 12 years' experience in the administration of elections. Mr Kangah was one of the editors of the International Institute for Democracy and Election Assistance's (IDEA) project on Administration and Cost of Elections (ACE). He has served as a consultant for many other election-related projects and programmes. With a wealth of experience in conflict resolution, he is well qualified in developing and promoting stable and transparent electoral processes. Mr Kangah has observed elections in more than 10 countries.

**Ms Judy Thompson (Canada)**

Ms Judy Thompson is a former election official, who served as Deputy Chief Electoral Officer for the province of Manitoba. For the past 10 years, she has worked as an election consultant in Africa, Asia and Europe with various international organisations and the Government of Canada. Her duties have included election administration, budgeting, voter education and democracy education, operations and policy.

**Secretariat Support Staff**

Professor Ade Adefuye

Dr Jackie Dugard

Ms Charlene Lee Ling

*Team Leader*

*Assistant to Observers*

*Administrative Assistant*

## ANNEX II

### Arrival Statement, 12 October 2001



## Commonwealth Observer Group

The Gambia Presidential Election, 18 October 2001

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Fax: +220 462834

The Kairaba Hotel

Kololi

The Gambia

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#### ARRIVAL STATEMENT BY HON MR P A SANGMA, MP CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMONWEALTH OBSERVER GROUP

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The Chairperson of the Independent Electoral Commission invited the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, the Rt. Hon. Don McKinnon to send a group to observe the Presidential Election to be held in The Gambia on 18 October 2001.

After receiving the invitation, the Secretary-General sent an Assessment Mission to The Gambia to determine whether the major political parties and others would welcome the presence of Commonwealth Observers and to ensure that observers would have free and open access to polling stations and counting stations and be free generally to pursue its mandate. The Assessment Mission visited The Gambia from 18-23 August 2001 and concluded that there was broad support for the presence of such a Group.

Following the report of the Assessment Mission, the Commonwealth Secretary-General constituted an Observer Group made up of the following:

Hon. P.A. **SANGMA**, MP  
Former Speaker, Lok Sabha, India

Dr Brigalia **BAM**  
Chairperson, Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), South Africa

Dr Karen **BREWER**  
Secretary-General, Commonwealth Magistrates' & Judges' Association  
United Kingdom

Hon. Mario **GALEA**, MP  
Government Whip, Malta

Mr David **KANGAH**  
Deputy Chairperson, Electoral Commission, Ghana

Ms Judy **THOMPSON**  
Electoral Expert, Canada

The Group will be supported by a Commonwealth Secretariat staff support team comprising Professor Ade Adefuye, Dr Jackie Dugard and Ms Charlene Lee Ling.

The Commonwealth Observer Group arrived in Banjul yesterday, the 11 October.

We want to assure the people of The Gambia that the Observer Group is not here to interfere with the affairs of your country, we have no supervisory or executive role whatsoever, we have no interest in the outcome of the election. We are here to make an honest, independent and impartial assessment of the election process as a part of ongoing Commonwealth efforts to promote, protect and strengthen democracy.

Each of us participates in our individual capacities. We represent the whole Commonwealth rather than the countries from which we have come, and we are most certainly independent of any political force in this country.

Our mandate is to consider the various factors impinging on the credibility of the electoral process as a whole and to determine in its own judgement whether the conditions exist for a free expression of will by the electors and if the results reflect the wishes of the people.

We will not interfere in the process. At every stage we will act with neutrality, impartiality, objectivity and independence.

In order to make such judgements, we will aim to arrive at a broad overview of the process. We will not be able to be present at every polling station or counting centre, but we hope that we will be able to take a representative sample.

Our immediate priority is to be briefed on arrangements for the elections. We will therefore be meeting with the IEC. We will also be meeting with political parties and non-governmental parties and others. After we have witnessed the immediate pre-election period, the campaigning and the media, we will observe the polling itself and the counting of the votes. To this end, on Tuesday, we will deploy around the country to observe the election on the ground. We will return here after polling to consider our report, which we will write here and sign before we depart, which is due to be on 22 October.

When we leave we will submit our report to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, who will in turn forward it to the Government of The Gambia, the IEC, the leadership of all the political parties taking part in the election and then to all Commonwealth governments. The report will be made publicly available, here and throughout the Commonwealth.

12 October 2001

## ANNEX III

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### Schedule of Engagements

#### Friday, 12 October

0900	Briefing by Advance Observer Group
1100	Press Conference
1330	United Democratic Party (UDP) coalition: Mr Femi Peters (Campaign Manager) and Mr Amadou Taal (national Organising Secretary)
1400	National Convention Party (NCP): Mr Abdou Njie and Mr Pa Seedy Njie (members of the national Executive)
1430	People's Democratic Organisation for Independence and Socialism (PDOIS): Mr Halifa Sallah (Secretary-General)
1600	National Reconciliation Party (NRP): Mr Amadou Souone (member of the national Executive) and Mr Suraye Jawo (Administrative Secretary)
1630	Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC): Mr Kelse Kinte (Administrative Secretary) and Mr Tombong Jatta (MP for Serekunda East)

#### Saturday, 13 October

0930	Media Organisations: <i>The Point</i> newspaper, the <i>Daily Observer</i> newspaper, <i>The Independent</i> newspaper, Gambian Radio and Television Services (GRTS), Radio 1 FM, Citizen FM, Sud FM
1100	Commonwealth High Commissioners: HE Mr Ibrahim Morikeh Fofana (High Commissioner, Sierra Leone), HE Mr Ayuba Jacob Ngbako (High Commissioner, Nigeria), HE Mr John Perrott (High Commissioner, United Kingdom)
1400	Non-Governmental Organisations: Action Aid, African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights, Amnesty International, Catholic Relief Services, Institute for Human Rights and Development, Transparency International

#### Sunday, 14 October

1630	Deployment Briefing
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#### Monday, 15 October

*Day with Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) and other international and domestic observers, including security briefing*

1900	Chairperson's Reception
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#### Tuesday, 16 October

*Deployment for Observers to Basse Santa Su and Sindola – remaining Observers attend final IEC briefings on media*

## ANNEX IV

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### Deployment of Commonwealth Observers

Base Location	Team
Kairaba Hotel Kololi	Mr P A Sangma Professor Ade Adefuye
Medical Research Council Basse Santa Su	Dr Karen Brewer Ms Judy Thompson
Sindola Safari Lodge Sindola	Dr Brigalia Bam Mr Mario Galea
Kairaba Hotel Kololi	Mr David Kangah Dr Jackie Dugard

## Observation Notes and Checklist for Poll and Count

7.	Complaints by Voters	No/Yes	Details:
8.	Domestic Observers present	No/Yes	Details:
9.	Atmosphere at station?	Orderly? Tense? Chaotic?	
10.	Secrecy of the Ballot	Assured? Poor? Uncertain?	
11.	Voting		
	(a) Personage attempts alleged:		No/Yes
	(b) Multiple voting attempts alleged:		No/Yes
	(c) Women deterred from voting? Details:		No/Yes
	(d) Voters not on register allowed to vote?		No/Yes
12.	Closing of Poll	On time? Numbers still in queue? Procedures followed?	No/Yes
13.	The Count	Are procedures being observed?	No/Yes
14.	Post Count	Procedures followed? Drums secure?	No/Yes
15.	Apparent fairness overall?	Good? Acceptable? Questionable?	
16.	Other Comments		

<p align="center"><b>COMMONWEALTH OBSERVER GROUP</b>  <b>THE GAMBIA</b>  <b>PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION</b>  <b>18 October 2001</b></p> <p align="center"><b>CHECKLIST FOR POLLING STATION VISITS</b></p>			
Team Member(s):	.....		
Constituency:	.....		
Polling Station:	.....		
Time of Arrival:	.....		
Time of Departure:	.....		
Voters in Queue:	Rate of Processing:	.....	
<hr/>			
1.	Opening of Poll	On time? No/Yes Details:	Procedures followed? No/Yes
2.	Register Process	State of the register? Are voters on it? Is there a Supplementary Register? Are there many objections?	
3.	Layout and Facilities	Good? Adequate? Poor?	
4.	Polling Staff	Efficient? Satisfactory? Poor?	
5.	Security Presence	Discreet? Intrusive? Oppressive?	
6.	Complaints by Party Agents	No/Yes	Details.

**COMMONWEALTH OBSERVER GROUP  
THE GAMBIA PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION  
18 October 2001**

## **OBSERVATION NOTES FOR POLL AND COUNT**

### **PART A**

The Observers may focus particular attention on the following aspects of the conduct of the election:

#### **THE CAMPAIGN**

1. Balance of TV/radio election coverage and extent and nature of access by party and other candidates.
2. Print media: nature of coverage and extent of access by the political parties.
3. The tone and content of material put out by the candidates, access to printing facilities.
4. The conduct of political meetings/rallies (permits for public meetings?)
5. The conduct of house-to-house canvassing of voters.
6. Nature, scale and effectiveness of Electoral Commission and other voter education on radio and television, in the print media and by other methods
7. Activities/measures to encourage the participation of women.
8. Access to funds and sources of funds.

Note: because the campaign will have effectively ended by the time you are deployed much of the evidence of the above is likely to be anecdotal and/or second hand information.

#### **THE POLL**

1. The location of polling stations.

2. Distances travelled by voters to polling booths, particularly in rural areas.
3. The procedure followed at the opening of the poll.
4. The length of time voters wait to cast their votes.
5. The adequacy or otherwise of facilities at polling stations and their state of readiness.
6. Availability of adequate supplies, e.g. ballot tokens, ink etc.
7. The performance of electoral officials at the polling stations visited.
8. The procedures in place to ensure proper security of ballot tokens, ballot drums and official seals
9. Arrangements to facilitate voting by women.
10. The steps taken to ensure that the secrecy of the ballot is assured.
11. The general atmosphere at the polling stations visited.
12. Access of party agents and domestic observers to polling stations.
13. Whether illiterate voters are assured of a vote in secret.
14. Whether the security of ballot drums in transit is assured.

#### **THE COUNT**

1. Inspection of seals.
2. The process of reconciling the number of people who voted with the number of ballot tokens in the drums.
3. The determination of invalid tokens.
4. The facilities for party agents and their representatives to witness and verify the count and overall transparency.
5. Access by domestic and international observers.
6. The conduct of election officers

## PART B

Questions that may be put and which you may ask yourself.

1. Was the Voters' Register compiled in a satisfactory way? Were people missed out? Were the names of dead people or "phantom voters" included?
2. Who are the election officials? How were they chosen? Are voters confident that they will be impartial?
3. Is the person in the street satisfied with arrangements? Will he/she vote? If not, is he/she afraid to do so? Were there any attempts to discourage/encourage the participation of women and were they effective?
4. Have all parties been able to campaign freely? Has the campaign been free of intimidation etc? Have all parties had full access to the mass media?
5. Is there freedom to advertise and distribute posters, leaflets etc?

### ON POLLING DAY

1. Before polling starts, are the ballot drums empty? Are they properly sealed? Are all procedures being adhered to?
2. Are all the parties/candidates represented at polling stations? Are they satisfied with the process?
3. Are the voters apparently voting freely? Are they enthusiastic? Do they talk freely? Do they exhibit signs of fear or intimidation?
4. Do voters understand the procedures properly? If not, are the procedures being explained fully and impartially? Are attempts being made to suggest how voters should vote?
5. Does the turnout indicate that women have been deterred from attending to vote?
6. Is only one person at a time being allowed into the voting compartment?
7. How long are voters waiting to vote? If a long time, are some being put off?

8. Are people without voters' cards being allowed to vote?
9. Are people whose names do not appear on the register being allowed to vote?
10. Will all parties be represented at the polling centres throughout voting and the count? Are agents adequately trained and vigilant?
11. Will domestic and foreign observers have free access to all stages of the process?
12. Is the security presence effective/oppressive?
13. Are the proper procedures followed at the end of polling?

### TRANSPORTATION

1. Are the drums safely transported from polling station to counting station?
2. Are party agents allowed to travel with the drums or follow behind the vehicles?

### THE COUNT

1. Are the drums kept safe until opened? Are all parties present at the opening?
2. Does the number of valid tokens cast tally with the record of those who voted?
3. Are the tokens counted properly? Are counting agents present? Are they satisfied with the procedures of the count?
4. Are the proper procedures followed for declaring votes as invalid?
5. How are results relayed/communicated?
6. Are there any objections by party agents?



## Interim Statement, 19 October 2001



### Commonwealth Observer Group

The Gambia Presidential Election, 18 October 2001

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#### **INTERIM STATEMENT BY HON MR P A SANGMA, MP CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMONWEALTH OBSERVER GROUP**

On behalf of my colleagues, the following statement indicates our preliminary view of the process we have been observing.

Overall, this was a good election. The turnout was impressive. Voters queued up long before polling stations opened. Except in a few instances, the people waited patiently to exercise their rights and in the process strengthen democracy which is one of the basic objectives of the Commonwealth.

We commend the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) for a job well done. We are in the process of preparing our report which will be submitted to the Secretary-General, who will then forward it to the Government of The Gambia, the political parties, and international organisations.

The report will of course include suggestions for improvement in aspects of the process. But this will not detract from our basic opinion that this has been a successful exercise.

We congratulate the IEC, the political parties, and most of all the people of The Gambia. Their future can only be better.

19 October 2001

## Departure Statement, 22 October 2001



### Commonwealth Observer Group

The Gambia Presidential Election, 18 October 2001

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#### **DEPARTURE STATEMENT BY HON MR P A SANGMA, MP CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMONWEALTH OBSERVER GROUP**

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We have now completed our observation of the 2001 Presidential Election in The Gambia. Before returning to our respective destinations, members of the Group have authorised me to make the following statement.

I would like to express my gratitude to the people of The Gambia, the political parties, members of the Press and the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC).

In our Interim Statement, I commented positively on the conduct of the elections. Nothing has happened to change that opinion. I, however, indicated that we will be making available suggestions for improvement for the future. These are with the hope of ensuring that the IEC is in a position to assist in the strengthening of democracy.

We want to place on record our sincere gratitude to the IEC for the cooperation extended to us which greatly facilitated our work. We do hope that the IEC will remain a permanent institution in the electoral process.

The Commission should take measures to instil confidence in the registration process by reconciling the original registration counterfoils with the computer voters' register.

We suggest that the IEC should in future count at the polling stations. This is more cost-effective and will constitute a good insurance against possible malpractice.

It has been a pleasure to observe the elections.

22 October 2001

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