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ELECTORAL COMMISSIONS FORUM OF SADC COUNTRIES

THE OBSERVATION STATEMENT SUBMITTED TO THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION OF MAURITIUS

INTRODUCTION

The Electoral Commissions Forum (ECF) of the SADC countries received an invitation letter dated 06th April 2010 from the Electoral Commission of Mauritius to observe the National Assembly Elections to be held on the 5th May 2010 in the Republic of Mauritius.

In response to this invitation, the ECF duly deployed to Mauritius a 20 Member Observer Mission represented by Electoral Commissions from Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, with the first delegates arriving in Port Louis on the 27th April 2010. The Mission was led by Mrs Joyce Laetitia Kazembe, the Deputy Chairperson of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission.

The ECF Mandate

The ECF, comprising all 15 SADC member states' Electoral Commissions, was launched in July 1998 and is governed by a Constitution. Among its various functions and activities, the ECF's mandate includes the following:

- To strengthen co-operation amongst Electoral Commissions in the SADC region;
- To promote conditions conducive to free, fair and transparent elections in the SADC region;

The ECF views election observation as an important component of promoting democratic elections and consolidating democracy in the SADC region. The rationale for the Forum's elections observation, therefore, is to assist fellow Election Management Bodies identify areas needing improvement in elections administration.

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Forum Presidency: Rev A. Malumalu - President (DRC), Justice A. Msosa -Vice President (Malawi)

EXCO: Chairperson: Justice F. Mumba (Zambia), - **Vice Chairperson:** Chief S.G Dlamini (Swaziland), Justice A.C P C. de Sousa (Angola) Justice S. Gaongalelwe (Botswana) Mr A Rahman (Mauritius) M.K. Mwinyichande (Zanzibar) Justice G. Chiweshe (Zimbabwe)

Pre-Poll Mission activities

1. The Mission met with the Electoral Commissioner of Mauritius (EC) on the 30th April 2010 which provided it with a comprehensive brief on their preparedness and readiness to conduct the elections. The Mission also visited the Information Technology (IT) section of the Commission to get insight on the capturing of data and the registration exercise. In addition, the Mission observed the verification of ballot papers and packing. The Mission learnt a lot about the proxy voting and it observed the capturing of proxy voting applications.
2. On the 3rd May 2010, the Mission, in cooperation with the Mauritius Council of Social Services (MACOSS) which is an umbrella NGO, organized a seminar with presenters coming from the media fraternity, the academia, women's organization, the Youth sector, Trade Union and Civil Society Organizations's. This seminar provided the Mission with information on the context within elections were taking place. The following concerns were brought up by the local stakeholders as they interacted with the Mission :
 - Issues of gender are not adequately addressed.
 - There is no enactment of regulation on media coverage of elections and protection of media.
 - The issues on ethnicity and candidature are a problem area for Mauritians.
 - Adequacy of time for preparation for the election following the dissolving of the National Assembly.
 - There is no strong justification for counting to take place the next day after voting.
 - There is no Political Party funding.
 - A lot of people may not be able to vote due to the early closure of registration.
 - There is need for constitutional amendments to address a number of concerns.
3. The Mission also met with the SADC Mission leader to discuss issues of mutual interest pertaining to election observation.
4. The Mission attended the two main political party rallies of the ruling and opposition parties held on the 1st May 2010 in Quatro-bornes and Port Louis respectively.

Deployment

The Mission divided itself into seven teams which covered the nineteen Constituencies of Mauritius.

The mission did not deploy delegates to Constituencies 14 and 21 (Rodrigues) for logistical reasons: it felt it could exchange observation notes with other international Missions that deployed members there.

Overview on the Poll

The Mission observed the following on the polling day:

- Generally, polling stations opened on time and opening procedures were adhered to.
- The polling staff were adequately trained and handled the voting process with professionalism and efficiency.
- The senior polling staff were very patient and the aspect of having reserve staff was an appreciated development in the electoral process.
- The voting process was peaceful, orderly and free of intimidation and the voters cast their ballots without any visible difficulties.
- The secrecy of the ballot was generally safe guarded at most of the polling stations.
- The layout of polling stations was uniform throughout.
- International observers, including party agents, were present when voting started at 0700hours.
- There were no domestic observers at the polling stations.
- Police officers were present and provided adequate signage to the polling stations as well as the needed security.
- The Directing Clerks did a marvelous job of directing voters and ensuring that there was no idling in the polling stations.
- The bold numbering on the ballot papers, the signature by Presiding officers, the official seal and official stamp provided adequate security features on the ballot papers.
- The voting booths were not user friendly to voters using wheel chairs.
- The closing procedures were adhered to with international observers and party agents overseeing the process.
- The transporting of ballot boxes to the counting centres was done efficiently, with all the needed security and the relevant persons accompanying the ballot boxes.
- There were no logistical challenges that could have material effect in the conduct of the poll.

Counting and Results Process

- The counting exercise and the announcement of results was meticulously and expeditiously executed.

Recommendations

Against the foregoing observations, the Mission recommends the following to the Electoral Commissioner of Mauritius:

1. The provision on the law regarding registration of political parties should be revisited.
2. Some form of identification during voting should be reconsidered.
3. Registration of voters to be structured in a way that it does not deny eligible voters the right to vote in an election year.

4. The need for provision of election material for people with disabilities(the blind, those using wheel chairs)
5. Counting at polling stations or counting centres on voting day to be considered.

Conclusion

The Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC countries submits that:

- Mauritius has credible elections emanating from public trust and transparency of electoral processes.
- The Electoral Commission of Mauritius was ready and prepared to conduct the elections
- The people of Mauritius were able to exercise their democratic right to vote in a dignified and peaceful manner.
- The Mission commends the Electoral Commission of Mauritius for a job well done.

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Mrs Joyce.Laetitia Kazembe
Mission Leader
Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC countries

7th May 2010, Port Louis, Mauritius

Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC Countries Observer Mission to MAURITIUS - 2010

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