



Commonwealth Observer Group

Malawi Parliamentary and Presidential Elections, 18 May 2004

News Release

21 May 2004

INTERIM STATEMENT

The following Interim Statement was issued this morning by Justice Joseph Warioba, Chair of the Commonwealth Observer Group

"Commonwealth Observer Teams observed the poll, count and results process closely yesterday across the country, in all three regions.

On the positive side the poll went well. The media, monitors of political parties and properly accredited domestic and international observers were allowed to be present throughout the process.

Despite all the confusion and the inadequacies of the preparations for these elections, the electoral staff rose to the occasion and should be congratulated. With a few exceptions the polling stations opened on time or soon thereafter. The opening and closing procedures were done properly.

The atmosphere at the polling stations was peaceful and we found no evidence of intimidation at the polls. The confusion resulting from the inadequate registration process caused some problems, especially with regard to voter transfers and absence of names on the computerised roll. However, the electoral staff did their best to ensure that anyone entitled to vote got the opportunity to do so.

Though the voting process was slow in some places because of the use of several rolls, the voters were generally patient, orderly and determined to cast their votes. The vote was generally cast in secrecy and we did not detect instances of cheating. The counting of votes was slow but transparent. The results process continues and we will make a final judgement on that at a later point.

Polling day cannot, however, be seen in isolation from the rest of the electoral process. On the negative side we have noted the serious inadequacies in the registration process and the inability of the Electoral Commission to resolve some important issues. We are also deeply concerned about the gross bias of the public media. The misuse of the advantages of incumbency is also a matter of grave concern to us. In our overall assessment of the whole electoral process we will take these matters into account.

The Commonwealth Observers return to Blantyre later today to prepare our final report, which will be signed in Malawi before the Group departs next week".

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