

## Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC Countries

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# Preliminary Statement of the Electoral Commissions Forum Observer Mission of SADC countries (ECF-SADC) on the Presidential and National Assembly elections held on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2014, in the Republic of Namibia

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The ECF-SADC was launched in July 1998 and is composed of fifteen (15) Electoral Commissions of the SADC member states. As stated in its constitution, its duties include strengthening cooperation between Electoral Commissions members, and to promote conditions conducive for the holding of credible and transparent elections in the SADC region.

The ECF-SADC was duly invited by the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN) through its Chairperson Advocate Notemba Tjipueja, to observe the 2014 Presidential and National Assembly elections.

In response to this invitation the Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC (ECF-SADC) deployed an Observer Mission, consisting of twelve (12) member commissions with the Head of the Mission being the National Electoral Commission (CNE) of Angola. The ECF-SADC mission comprised 44 delegates from electoral commissions of Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, Zanzibar and Zimbabwe. The Mission Period was 19<sup>th</sup> November to 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2014.

The Mission was led by Dr Agostinho Lima, a Commissioner at the National Electoral Commission of Angola, assisted by Honorable Justice Abednego Tafa, Chairperson of the Independent Electoral Commission of Botswana.

## 2. THE ROLE OF THE ECF-SADC ELECTION OBSERVER MISSION

The ECF-SADC views election observation as an important component of promoting democratic elections and consolidating democracy in the SADC region, hence its

**Forum Presidency:** Justice Rita Makarau- President (Zimbabwe), Justice André da Silva Neto – (Angola)  
**EXCO: Chairperson:** Justice Mahapela Lehohla (Lesotho), **Vice Chairperson:** Justice Maxon R. Mbendera, SC (Malawi), Justice A. Tafa (Botswana), Mr. M. I. Abdool Rahman (Mauritius), Mr. Hendrick Gappy (Seychelles), Hon Jecha Salim Jecha (Zanzibar), Justice Irene Mambilima (Zambia).

involvement. Through election observation process, the ECF-SADC strives to assist fellow Election Management Bodies (EMBs) to identify areas needing improvement in elections administration and management.

The ECF-SADC election observations are principally guided by two (2) major instruments, namely the Principles for Election Management, Monitoring and Observation in the SADC Region<sup>1</sup> (PEMMO) and the Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections in the SADC Region<sup>2</sup>. In essence these two regional electoral instruments set benchmarks for the running and management of transparent and credible elections.

In the spirit of cooperation and learning from each other, member Commissions have developed a practice of attaching its staff to a member Commission which is conducting an election, in this instance the Electoral Commissions of Botswana and Lesotho have sent staff for attachment with the ECN.

### **3. PRE-ELECTORAL ACTIVITIES OF THE MISSION**

The Mission engaged in a number of pre electoral activities which included the following:

- Upon arrival, delegates were efficiently accredited and provided with relevant materials.
- A courtesy visit to the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN) on 21<sup>st</sup> November, 2014 where the Mission was briefed on the preparedness of the ECN and benefitted from a demonstration of the use of Electronic Voting Machine (EVM). The Mission was given an opportunity to tour the Commission's offices including observing the dispatch of election material which was on going at warehouse of the ECN to the various police stations at the regions.
- Observing the political party rallies on the 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2014.
- On 24<sup>th</sup> November, 2014, the Mission held a seminar with various stakeholders, including the media, academia, civil society and the political parties in order to establish the various perspectives on the elections that were to take place on 28th November.
- Attended the orientation of observers organized by the ECN on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2014. .

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<sup>1</sup> Produced by the Electoral Commissions Forum and the Electoral Institute of Southern Africa (EISA): Adopted on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2003, Johannesburg

<sup>2</sup> Adopted in 2005 at the SADC Heads of State and Government Summit held Mauritius in 2005.

- Participated in the Heads of Missions meetings organized by the African Union and SADC on 27<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> November, 2014.
- Deployment of teams to the various regions.
- Attended the Press briefing sessions by the ECN

#### **4. EARLY VOTING ABROAD**

The legal framework of the Republic of Namibia (the Constitution and the Electoral Act) provides for advance voting, where voters registered abroad, had the opportunity to exercise their right to vote in diplomatic missions outside the country, on 14<sup>th</sup>, November, 2014.

However, the Mission was informed by ECN that elections went as planned and that the EVM was not used in these elections but the normal voting by ballot paper.

Similarly, voters registered to work offshore also had a chance to vote on the same day, in Walvis Bay and Luderitz.

#### **5. DEPLOYMENT**

The Mission deployed ten (10) teams to cover five (5) regions of the country namely: Hardap (Mariental/Rural/Urban East/Urban West), Ojozondjupa, Omaheke, Khomas (West/Khomasdal/Okuriangava) and Erongo.

The deployment period was 25<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> November 2014 and all the teams managed to undertake the pre-election observation and establish the preparedness of the ECN to conduct the elections.

#### **6. POLLING DAY**

The Mission generally observed the following:

- Most polling stations did not open on time stipulated in the Electoral Law;
- Polling station procedures were adhered to;
- Most polling stations had challenges with the digital verification process of the voters and in some instances the manual voters roll was used;
- Election materials were adequate in all polling stations visited;
- The layout of polling stations allowed for smooth flow of voters, however there were inconsistencies in the management of polling stations by presiding officers;

- International and domestic observers were visible at most polling stations visited;
- Party agents were present but did not necessarily represent all the contesting political parties;
- Most voters were not fully conversant with the use of Electronic Voting Machines (EVM);
- Presiding Officers seemed knowledgeable on the polling procedures related to the EVM;
- Long voting queues were visible in most polling stations but orderly throughout polling;
- Most observers had challenges identifying the location of polling stations;
- Signage to polling stations was not visible enough;
- Voters with disabilities were duly assisted and in some polling stations priority was given to the elderly and the expectant and nursing mothers;
- Voters voted freely without any intimidation and the secrecy of the ballot was safe guarded;
- There was noticeable presence of security forces in polling stations;
- Voters went through a tedious process in relation to verification and use of Ink. This process was somewhat unhygienic and could be a health hazard;
- The tents used for polling were too small to accommodate observers, polling staff and the voting equipment;
- There was live broadcast and election coverage in national television (NBC1) and radio stations;
- Regular statements were issued by the ECN on polling;
- Most polling stations did not close at the stipulated time, however, the polling stations that opened late were allowed to extend their closing time in accordance with the law;
- In some polling stations voting continued into the early hours of the next day (November 29<sup>th</sup>);
- The results management at polling stations was conducted effectively and transparently.

## **7. BEST PRACTICES and LESSONS LEARNT**

The Mission has taken note of some of the best practices and lessons learnt during the observation:

- Namibia is commended for being the first African country to use the EVM;
- The availability of the Electoral Commission of Namibia to address and demonstrate the use of EVM machines to all observers;
- The introduction of the device (VIVD) to verify the identification of voters;

- The inclusion of Braille instructions on the EVM to facilitate voting by the visually impaired;
- Regular public updates by ECN;
- The campaigns of political parties, organized all over the country were peaceful and there were no major incidents of violence;
- Noticeable involvement of the youth and persons with disabilities as polling officers;
- Gender balanced polling officers.

## **8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Given the above Observations, the Mission recommends the following for consideration by ECN and other stakeholders:

### **Legal Framework**

- Timely consultations and release of electoral amendments to facilitate public understanding and confidence in the electoral processes;
- Consideration for decentralization of ECN operations at the Regions to facilitate service delivery.

### **Logistics**

- Strengthen logistics and planning for polling especially in the area of distribution and transport;
- Provide spacious polling tents;
- Provide observers with information on location of polling stations;
- Intensify voter education on EVMs;
- Display of posters on EVMs at polling station.

### **Polling and Closing**

- Increase training on the management and the layout of the polling station;
- Consider alternative methods of applying and handling UV and indelible ink;
- Ensure thorough training of polling staff on pre poll testing of EVMs;
- Limit voters to specific constituencies/ polling stations to address the long queues during voting day.

### **Stakeholders**

- Improve interaction with stakeholders to increase their confidence in ECN and also the electoral process;
- Gender Sensitization to promote women's participation in electoral processes.

## Security

- Enhanced training of security officers on their role during elections;
- Political party agents at polling stations should be identifiable.

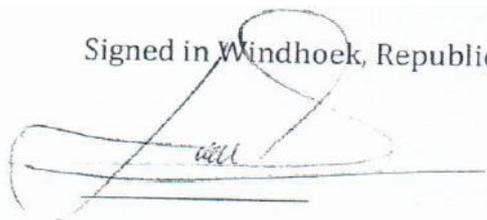
## 9. CONCLUSION

The Mission is pleased to share their observations with the people of the Republic of Namibia and take this opportunity to commend the spirit of tolerance that was upheld in the build-up to and during the 2014 Presidential and National Assembly elections.

The Mission would like to congratulate the Electoral Commission of Namibia for its preparedness to conduct the Presidential and Parliamentary elections in an efficient and effective manner. Despite the limited time frame following the promulgation of new electoral laws and reforms, the ECN proved ready and able to carry through the electoral processes.

On behalf of the Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC countries, and on my own behalf, I congratulate the people of the Republic of Namibia, the Electoral Commission of Namibia and all electoral stakeholders on the holding of peaceful and credible elections.

Signed in Windhoek, Republic of Namibia, November 30, 2014

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'all', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and somewhat illegible.

Dr. Agostinho Lima

Leader of the ECF-SADC Observer Mission & Commissioner - National Electoral Commission of Angola (CNE-Angola)