



# **Commonwealth Observer Group Rwanda Presidential Elections 2010**

## **INTERIM STATEMENT**

**H.E. Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim**  
**Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group**

The Commonwealth was invited to observe the 9 August 2010 elections by the National Electoral Commission. The Secretary-General of the Commonwealth decided to deploy a 13-person Observer Group supported by a staff team from the Secretariat. I am honoured to have been asked to Chair the Group, which has been present in the country since 2 August 2010.

During this period we have met with the National Electoral Commission, representatives of contesting political parties, other stakeholders, the Minister for Local Government, civil society, media, Commonwealth High Commissions as well as other international and national observers.

Over the electoral period our teams reported from Kigali City and the four Provinces, where we observed the voting, counting and tabulation processes. We also met with electoral officials, national and international observers and other stakeholders at the provincial and national levels in order to build up a larger picture regarding the conduct of the process.

### **Overview**

- The 9 August Presidential Elections in Rwanda were conducted in a peaceful atmosphere. During the campaign, candidates enjoyed freedom of movement and assembly and they did not report any incidents. On the day of the election, universal suffrage was provided for, voters turned out in very large numbers across the country and the process was well administered by the National Electoral Commission (NEC).
- Rwanda is still undergoing a process of national reconstruction and the country has taken great strides, just 16 years since the 1994 genocide. As part of this reconstruction the country has, to its credit, embarked on a process of establishing electoral democracy.
- We understand the terrible legacy of the past and the consequent caution as the country moves forward. However, we are also cognisant as to what is required for Rwanda to forge ahead as a pluralistic democracy, enjoying the associated freedoms and rights. Many freedoms and rights are provided for in the existing legal framework, but there remain

problems in the implementation and practice, with some limits placed on freedom of association and participation.

- While taking account of Rwanda's historical context and the tragic events of 1994, and the understandable need to guard against any such tendencies re-emerging, there is a balance to be found and our hope is that as Rwanda moves forward the balance can be more in favour of an inclusive process and more space for open, responsible debate among the country's political parties and in the media.

## **Management of the Electoral Process**

The NEC was well prepared for the elections and exhibited a high standard of organisation, which added confidence to the process. NEC officers worked professionally and diligently in their management of the process. The updating of the voter register provided for universal suffrage and the inclusion of photos on the Final Voter Register was a positive feature. The new consolidated Presidential Election Law, of June 2010, was also an improvement.

On the day of the election, observers reported that preparations were in place for the timely opening of the poll and voters turned out in very large numbers. Polling Stations were well organised and staff worked diligently to process voters. Political party representatives were present in many cases, but overwhelmingly only from the incumbent candidate's party. It is unfortunate that other parties did not deploy representatives in many cases, as this right is a key transparency safeguard.

The Final Voter Register appeared to be largely accurate and requisite checks were in place due to the inclusion of photos on the register and the requirement for voters to show ID. Based on our reports, the count in the polling stations was transparent and conducted fairly, though with a few inconsistent practices. Our teams continue to follow and report on the tabulation process.

## **Election Campaign and Political Participation**

During the election campaign, candidates from the four contesting parties held campaign rallies around the country and none reported any impediments to their activities. The campaign was peaceful and enjoyed some positive innovations, such as the debates. Hopefully the 2010 campaign will help to further sensitise Rwandan voters to the dynamic of multi-party competitive and periodic elections.

However, while the campaign was fairly active, albeit dominated by the largest party, the fact that the four candidates were all drawn from the governing coalition meant there was a lack of critical opposition voices. A number of opposition parties had earlier stated their intention to stand but faced either legal or administrative problems, which resulted in their non-participation. Each case appears to be different, but the overall impact is a concern. In addition, concerns were also raised to us about problems faced by some media outlets.

## **Conclusion**

As with most elections we observe, there are positive developments and there are areas of concern. For the 2010 elections Commonwealth Observers have found a well organised and peaceful poll. The National Electoral Commission has conducted the technical aspects very well, providing confidence to the people to turn out in large numbers. We commend the people of Rwanda for their active involvement and for their belief in the electoral process.

At the same time, as Rwanda strives to deepen its democratic process, it needs to address issues of political participation and greater media freedoms so that the key benchmarks for democratic elections, to which Rwanda has committed itself, can be fully met.

This statement is an interim one, and reflects our preliminary findings up to this point in the process. Following the return of our teams from the field we will compile our Final Report, which will contain our final conclusions as well as recommendations for suggested changes where required.

**Kigali, 10 August 2010**

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