

**Interim Statement by HE Sir Arnold Amet  
Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group**

The Commonwealth Observer Group began its work in the Solomon Islands on 28 March 2006. The full team was preceded by two advance observers who arrived in the country on 14 March 2006.

The Group consists of seven experienced Commonwealth persons supported by four officials from the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Our mandate from the Commonwealth Secretary-General is:

- To consider the various factors impinging on the credibility of the electoral process as a whole;
- To assess whether, in our own judgement, the conditions exist for a free expression of will by the electors; and
- To determine if the result of the elections reflect the wishes of the people.

Prior to deployment the team was briefed by members of the Electoral Commission, political parties, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), Commonwealth High Commissioners and others. The team also attended briefings organised by the UNEAD Election Observer Coordination Team, who also coordinated the deployment of international observers.

The Commonwealth Observer Group was able to deploy team members to the following provinces: Honiara, Guadalcanal, Western, Central and Malaita. On polling day we visited a large number of polling stations where we were able to witness the opening, voting during the day and the closing of the polls. We will also be observing the counting process for as many constituencies as possible.

Up to the close of polls we were impressed with the open and transparent manner in which the elections were conducted, particularly in view of the fact that this was the first occasion on which the new single ballot box system was used.

Solomon Islands electoral officials are to be congratulated for their commitment and hard work during the conduct of the elections. The Commonwealth Observer Group was also pleased with the commitment demonstrated by the 83 Domestic Observers deployed in Honiara, Guadalcanal, Western Province, and Malaita. The Group would also like to thank the UNEAD Team for its role in the coordination and deployment of observers. Their efforts have made wide observation by our team possible.

In places we observed, polling stations opened and closed at the appointed times and voting in general proceeded peacefully and smoothly. Before and during the election, a number of issues have been raised by electors, for example with regard to the electoral register and voter turnout. The Commonwealth Observer Group will be considering all relevant issues when compiling its report but I will refrain from commenting upon them before receiving a full picture based on reports from all our teams deployed in other provinces.

Following observation of the count, the full Commonwealth Observer Group will reconvene in Honiara to write our report. We will take into account our direct observations of the polling and results process. We will also consider the electoral environment as a whole – the legal framework, the voter registration process, civic and voter education, the media, the freedom of the parties and the candidates to campaign, and the freedom of the voters to vote as they wish. We will complete the report here and sign it before we depart on 14 April.

When we leave we will submit our report to the Commonwealth Secretary-General. He will in turn forward it to the Government, the Electoral Commission, the leaders of all the political parties and then to all Commonwealth governments. The report will then be made publicly available, here and throughout the Commonwealth.

Before leaving the Solomon Islands we are likely to issue a ‘departure statement’.

We congratulate the people of Solomon Islands on a peaceful polling day and wish them well as they approach the conclusion of this electoral process.

Honiara, 6 April 2006