

**INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION (IEOM)
COTE D'IVOIRE 2020**

.....
PRESS RELEASE - Abidjan, November 2, 2020

“NON-INCLUSIVE IVORIAN ELECTION IS BOYCOTTED, LEAVING COUNTRY FRACTURED”

EISA and The Carter Center again urge political leaders to pursue inclusive dialogue

In a statement released today, the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) and The Carter Center reported their preliminary findings following their observation of the Oct. 31, 2020, presidential election in Côte d'Ivoire.

The mission's report highlighted concerns that the overall context and process did not allow for a genuinely competitive election. The process excluded a number of Ivorian political forces and was hampered by an active boycott by a segment of the population and a volatile security environment. Several candidates ultimately did not contest the election and broad sectors of the Ivorian population did not participate; these issues now threaten the acceptance of the results and the country's cohesion.

The mission expressed serious concerns about restrictions on civil liberties, freedom of expression, and the right to vote and be elected, which run counter to Côte d'Ivoire's regional and international commitments to democratic elections. This situation threatens the democratic advances consolidated by the country over the past decade. In addition, these problems increase the risk of conflict and violence and may lead to a decline in democracy that could extend beyond the country's borders.

EISA and The Carter Center join the international community in once again urging President Alassane Ouattara and opposition leaders to address their political and electoral differences through an inclusive dialogue. In addition, the observer mission urges all Ivorians to maintain their commitment to peace throughout the remaining part of the electoral process and to use legal channels, as provided by Ivorian laws, to deal with election-related appeals and disputes.

The tense and polarized political environment that surrounded this election was fueled by President Ouattara's decision to run for a third term and the Constitutional Council's validation of his candidacy. This ruling, which was the center of various debates, was not based on clear and justified legal foundations and served only to reinforce the recurrent perception of a lack of impartiality on the part of Ivorian judicial and electoral institutions. Insufficient efforts were made to foster dialogue among key political actors in the run-up to the elections. Late-stage government proposals to include opposition figures in the election administration did little to address longstanding grievances in the short time remaining before the elections.

The preelection period was further disrupted by government and opposition actions aimed at undermining the democratic rights of Ivorians. The use of the state of emergency as a legal basis to restrict the rights of expression and assembly did not allow citizens to exercise their fundamental freedoms during such a critical period, and these freedoms continued to be restricted even after the state of emergency was lifted.

Opposition party leaders responded, calling on their supporters to engage in civil disobedience to obstruct the preparation and conduct of the election. Although they called for **legal action**, these calls, made in a polarized and tense preelection environment, significantly increased violence. EISA and The Carter Center deplore the deaths of at least 40 people and the injury of several hundred throughout the election process, including on polling day.

The IEOM deployed 16 observer teams, which were able to observe voting operations in 213 polling stations in 17 of the country's 33 regions and autonomous districts. Although officials generally adhered to voting procedures in the majority of the polling stations visited, voting processes took place amid a highly problematic context. Election day was marked by an active boycott, causing a large number of incidents and a volatile security environment. In six of the 17 regions, observers noted that the organization of the vote was heavily impacted. At least 1,052 polling stations were never able to operate. Observers also noted that the turnout at the polls showed strong disparities across the country, with relatively high rates in the north and lower rates in the center and west, and were very variable in the south of the country.

The audit of the electoral roll, which took place in 2020, significantly increased the number of registered voters, accounting for approximately 71% of potential eligible voters. However, a general lack of transparency regarding the actions taken to clean the registry has still not reassured all actors that the list is accurate. There are particular concerns about territorial representation, the comprehensiveness of voter data, the de-registration of deceased voters, and the possibility of duplications on this list. The election commission should therefore conduct an external audit to ensure all politicians that the electoral roll meets international standards.

Given the increased risk of conflict, it behooves on all Ivorian leaders to refrain from any rhetoric likely to fuel violence. The mission calls on them to denounce any violation of the code of good conduct and encourages the Independent Electoral Commission and other stakeholders to call to order those who have allegedly violated the code of good conduct.

For any information, please contact the mission's press officer

- **Mr. Abraham Kouassi:** Abraham.Kouassi@cartercenter.org - **Mobile: +225 57847490**