



## **EISA Witnessing Mission to the Egypt People's Assembly Elections**

**28-29 November 2011**

### **Preliminary Statement**

#### **1. Introduction**

Following the granting of an authorisation to the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) by the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its subsequent accreditation by the Supreme Judicial Commission for Elections, the Institute deployed a mission to witness Egypt's People's Assembly elections. The voting process is staggered to take place across three regions on separate polling days, namely: 28-29 November 2011 (Phase I); 14 December 2011 (Phase II); and 3 January 2012 (Phase III) with the possibility of runoff elections. This preliminary statement covers Phase I of the People's Assembly elections which were held on 28-29 November 2011.

Led by Mr. Denis Kadima, the Institute's Executive Director, the mission is presently composed of ten members drawn from civil society organisations from South Africa, Tunisia, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire and Cameroon.

These parliamentary elections are the first truly competitive elections since the fall of the former regime headed by Hosni Mubarak, following the January-February 2011 revolution. These elections offer Egypt a unique opportunity to start the building of a democratic state. It is against this backdrop that EISA deployed this mission as a sign of solidarity vis-à-vis the people of Egypt in their tireless effort toward democratic change.

The EISA Mission has made its assessment of the 28-29 November 2011 Egyptian elections, and its early findings and recommendations are presented in this statement. Our views are based on the Constitution and laws of the Arab Republic of Egypt, EISA's Principles for Election Management and Witnessing (PEMMO), the African Union's Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa and the Declaration of Principles on International Election Witnessing. The Mission met various national electoral stakeholders and other witnessing teams. Following a one-day briefing in Cairo, EISA deployed teams of witnesses to cover the following areas: Cairo, Alexandria, Fayoum and Hurghada. On election days, the EISA teams visited a total of 162 polling stations and subsequently observed the counting of ballot papers at the counting centres.

As the counting and tallying are still in progress, the Mission's conclusion on the conduct of Phase 1 of these parliamentary elections is restricted to the period up to 30 November 2011.

## **2. Findings and recommendations**

The EISA Mission has made the following preliminary findings:

### **Constitutional and Legal Framework for Elections**

The Mission found that the constitutional and legal framework of elections in Egypt largely meets the minimum conditions for the holding democratic elections. However, several weaknesses were identified. For example, the differentiation of independent candidates between "farmers/workers" and "professionals" with a quota of at least 50% of elected seats in the chambers reserved for farmers/workers at the expense of professionals was inconsistent with the key democratic principle of equality between candidates. It is therefore recommended that this provision be reconsidered in the next cycle of parliamentary elections.

### **Atmosphere of voting**

- The EISA Mission commends the people of Egypt for the high voter turnout and their peacefulness and patience on the voting days. The Mission encourages Egyptian voters to continue to act peacefully throughout this protracted electoral process.
- Security forces are also acknowledged for their contribution to the peaceful atmosphere which prevailed throughout the voting and counting process.
- The political and electoral authorities are lauded for their decision to extend voting to two days, a decision that allowed more voters to cast their ballots.

### **Voting and counting operations**

EISA witnesses noted the following key points during the voting and counting operations, notably:

- There was a sizeable number of female polling staff. The Mission regards this as a positive development.
- The layout of polling stations often did not allow for the easy flow of voters, nor did it ensure the secrecy of the ballot
- In several polling stations, polling staff failed to check voters hands for ink or to apply it properly after voting, which is an important safeguard against multiple voting
- Illegal continuation of electioneering with the distribution of candidate posters and party messages to the queuing voters on voting days
- Some voters appeared not to be familiar with the voting procedures
- Party and candidate agents and domestic witnesses were not adequately represented in most polling stations visited

- International witnesses were denied access to some polling stations and counting centres
- The centralisation of counting caused logistical challenges and delays. The Mission recommends that the counting of ballots at polling station level be considered in the next electoral cycle for enhanced transparency and efficiency

The EISA Mission believes that many of these weaknesses and procedural inconsistencies could have been avoided if a manual of procedures was compiled and distributed to all polling staff, and training of these polling staff conducted.

### 3. Conclusion and way forward

At this stage of the process, the Mission notes with satisfaction that the opportunity was largely given to the Egyptian voters to express their free will. It is the hope of the Mission that the counting, tabulation and announcement of results as well as the remaining phases of the parliamentary elections will be conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the final electoral outcome reflects the will of the Egyptian voters.

The Institute will produce successive preliminary statements after key steps in the electoral process, and a final report about three months after the holding of the last leg of parliamentary elections. The report will provide an in-depth analysis, detailing findings and recommendations. In the meantime, the Electoral Institute plans to witness the remaining parliamentary elections,

The EISA Election Witnessing Mission is grateful to the people of the Arab Republic of Egypt for their warmth and hospitality vis-à-vis our teams. We acknowledge and appreciate the courteous and friendly manner in which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Supreme Judicial Commission for Elections assisted our Mission.

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#### **About EISA**

*Formed in 1996, the Electoral Institute for Sustainable democracy in Africa (EISA) has established itself as a leading player in the field of elections and democracy in Africa. EISA has evolved from an election NGO servicing Southern Africa into a more diversified organisation working throughout the continent with national, regional, Pan-African and global partners. The Institute's work covers not only elections but also other Democracy & Governance fields like political party development, conflict management, legislative strengthening, the African Peer Review Mechanism and local governance and decentralisation. With its headquarters in Johannesburg (South Africa), EISA has current and past field offices in countries including Angola, Burundi, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique and Sudan, a reflection of its broader geographical mandate.*

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