

C/O IEC –Botswana
7th Floor- Block 8
Government Enclave
P/Bag 00284
Gaborone, Botswana



Tel (+267) 3180012
(+267) 3612400
Fax (+267) 3180016
(+267) 3905205
URL- www.sadc-ecf.org

ELECTORAL COMMISSIONS FORUM OF SADC COUNTRIES

THE OBSERVATION STATEMENT SUBMITTED TO THE Elections and Boundaries Commission of Swaziland

INTRODUCTION

The Electoral Commissions Forum (ECF) of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries was invited by the Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC) of Swaziland through a letter dated 29th July 2008 to observe the 2008 National Assembly Elections scheduled for the 19th of September 2008. In response to this invitation, the ECF duly deployed a 14 member Observer Mission.

The Mission hereby presents this statement on its observations, a full report of which will be availed at a later stage.

ABOUT THE ECF-SADC

This is an autonomous body of 14 electoral commissions in the SADC region which cooperate and support each other on electoral matters. The Forum is governed by a constitution that seeks to promote:

- conditions conducive to free, fair and transparent elections, and
- through the electoral process, democracy as a political system of responsible and accountable government.

More importantly, the major rationale behind the ECF observing elections in the SADC region is to enhance and consolidate the capacity of election management bodies in the administration of elections.

MISSION COMPOSITION

The Electoral Commissions represented in the ECF-SADC Observer Mission were from the following countries:

- Botswana
- the Democratic Republic of Congo,
- Mozambique,
- Namibia and
- The Republic of Zimbabwe.

The first delegates arrived in Manzini on the 9th September 2008. Justice George Chiweshe, Chairperson of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, was appointed to lead the mission.

BRIEF BY THE EBC

The Mission was briefed by the EBC on the level of its preparedness for the elections and was reasonably satisfied as it was able to gather adequate information on key issues that are central to the conduct of same.

CONSULTATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS

The Mission also consulted with a number of stakeholders through organising a seminar at which a number of them were invited. The following was covered;

- The level of impartiality of the media in the coverage of elections;
- Perspectives of some politicians on the elections
- The historical and political background of Swaziland elections and the current electoral system, and
- Perspectives of Civil Society and Non-governmental Organisations on the forthcoming elections.

The Mission also held separate consultative meetings with the SADC Observer Mission and EISA technical team to share notes on the elections. The seminar and consultative meetings equipped the mission with general broad knowledge and provided divergent views on the context and environment in which the elections would be held.

DEPLOYMENT

The Mission covered eight of the fifty- five constituencies in the four regions of Swaziland. The deployment teams covered Lobamba, Ludzeludze, Maphalaleni, Kukhanyeni, Mbabane East, Mbabane West, Manzini East and Manzini West. All the teams managed to make pre-polling visits to their assigned constituencies.

OBSERVATIONS

The Mission observed the following;

- The environment during the pre-poll period was generally quiet and peaceful
- The EBC put all logistics together to facilitate efficient holding of elections
- The consultative meetings with local stakeholders were adequately covered by the Media.

With regard to polling day, the Mission observed that:

- In most areas observed by the mission, the opening of polling stations procedures were done in accordance with the electoral law and attendant regulations.
- Candidates and/or their agents were present at most of the polling stations.
- Foreign and local observers had unfettered access to polling stations. .
- There were generally adequate election materials in polling stations visited by the mission.
- There were no direction posters for polling stations.
- The lay-out within the polling stations was generally satisfactory.
- Every voter produced and used her/his voter registration card which was properly recorded before s/he received and cast her/his vote.
- Once voting commenced at a polling station, the voting process was smooth and fast.
- It appears to the mission that polling staff were adequately trained to handle the elections.
- The presence of the police generally guaranteed the already existing peaceful atmosphere.
- The closing of poll and counting procedures were conducted in accordance with the electoral law.

- Turn out was high in some of the polling stations visited by the mission.
- In spite of this high turn out, a few spoilt ballot papers were noted.
- Consequent upon a court order, no voting took place in five constituencies owing to alleged irregularities that took place during the primary elections.
- In some polling stations, voters who were through with the process were still milling around the polling stations.

Conclusion

As a result of the afore-going, the mission is of the view that the ECB was adequately prepared for the elections and that a conducive environment existed for the electorate to exercise its will freely.

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Hon. Justice George Chiweshe
Mission Leader

21st September 2008, Manzini , Swaziland