

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT BY THE NAMIBIA INSTITUTE FOR DEMOCRACY (NID) ON THE 2009 NATIONAL AND PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

The Namibia Institute for Democracy has observed the recent national and presidential elections through the deployment of close to 300 domestic observers countrywide. The NID's findings were informed by reports received from these observers, who were trained by the NID throughout 2009 to observe the pre-election, election and post-election phase in a non-partisan manner.

The NID conducted its activities in accordance with the laws of the Republic of Namibia and the Principles for Election Management, Monitoring and Observation in the SADC Region.

The enthusiasm of Namibians to vote during the two-day polling process in an orderly and peaceful manner, the wide deployment of national and international observers who had free access to polling stations during polling and counting and the professional non-partisan manner in which the Namibian Police and security forces conducted their duties were commendable, and contributed to a peaceful, free and fair polling process.

Unfortunately, problematic issues relating to the often inept performance of some ECN officials, problems with the voters roll and the system of counting and verification of ballots, exacerbated by the large number of tendered ballots, led to the announcement of the final election results only a week after polls closed. This casts a shadow over what otherwise could have been exemplary elections and may now lead to the non-acceptance of results by the biggest opposition political parties, which is regrettable. Logistical and organisational deficiencies of the ECN in organising the elections are a matter of concern. The NID will, however, discuss options and solutions to areas of concern as detected by its observers with the ECN and other relevant stakeholders at an opportune time. The relatively low voter turnout in some constituencies is a matter of concern, which the NID will investigate further in 2010 through the conduct of a study on voter motivation.

The ruling party was able to confirm its two-thirds majority and Namibia therefore remains in the category of a "dominant party state". Given the fact that the Rally for Democracy and Progress [RDP] was for the first time competing in general elections with other parties, the election result, which has elevated the party to the strongest opposition force, places the pressure on the party to deliver on promises made to earn its status as official opposition and not fade into early insignificance.

An accurate and complete assessment of any election must take into account all aspects of the process, and no election can be viewed in isolation from the political context in which it takes place. Among the factors that will be considered to be included into the NID's final and detailed elections observation report due in January 2010 are issues such as the legal framework for the elections, the ability of citizens to seek and receive sufficient and accurate information upon which to make political choices, the ability of political competitors to organize and reach out to citizens in order to win their support, the conduct of the mass media in providing coverage of candidates and issues, the freedom that citizens and political competitors have to engage in the political and electoral process without fear of intimidation, violence or retribution for their choices, the conduct of the voter registration process, the right to stand for election, the conduct of voting, counting, transmission and announcement of results, the handling of election complaints and the installation to office of those duly elected. It should also be noted that no electoral framework is perfect, and all electoral and political processes experience challenges.

The NID is grateful for the welcome and cooperation it received from voters, election officials, candidates, political party leaders, the media, domestic and international election observers, and civic activists.

The complete detailed report on the observation of the national elections by the NID and its coalition partners will be released and disseminated in January 2010.