

**SOUTH AFRICAN CIVIL SOCIETY ELECTION COALITION
(SACSEC)**



**C/O SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
P.O BOX 62098, MARSHALLTOWN, 2107**

Tel. +27 11 241 7800/9

e.mail: luke@sacc.org.za

fax.+27 11 492 1448/9

**SACSEC COMMENDS FREE AND FAIR NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL 2009
ELECTIONS**

JOHANNESBURG (24 APRIL 2009) – The South African Civil Society Election Coalition (SACSEC) is satisfied that South Africa’s fourth round of national and provincial elections was conducted in a substantially free, fair, transparent and credible manner.

SACSEC is a network of South African non-governmental and civil society organisations and is co-ordinated nationally by the South African Council of Churches and provincially by partner organizations such as the Electoral Institute of Southern Africa, the South African Catholic Bishop’s Conference and the KwaZulu Natal Democracy and Election Forum. SACSEC trained and deployed 1500 observers to scrutinise the entire electoral process in all nine provinces. In KwaZulu Natal SACSEC, in collaboration with the KwaZulu Natal Democracy and Election Forum, deployed 550 observers. SACSEC also deployed 100 pre election observers who attended political party rallies and attended various meetings and events in the run up to the election in all the provinces. 7 international observers were also deployed in Gauteng, KwaZulu Natal and Western Cape. They came from the United Church of Canada, the All Africa Conference of Churches. Their presence and visibility contributed significantly to the smooth running of the elections at voting and counting stations.

Special attention was given to “hotspots”, particularly in KwaZulu Natal where observers and violence monitors were present in the pre-election phase as well as at voting and counting stations.

The pre-election period generally went smoothly. SACSEC noted that there were unfortunately some incidents of violence, including disruption of party meetings, elections posters being removed or defaced, parties denied access to venues and supporters from several contesting parties displaying low levels of political tolerance.

These elections also saw a successful application brought on behalf of voters living outside South Africa to exercise their democratic choice. Initial reports indicate wide support by these voters to cast their votes. A final count is still to be released by the IEC.

The South African Electoral Act also provides an opportunity for certain categories of voters to cast a special vote. Those voters who did not make use of the Special Vote were given special attention at voting stations.

SACSEC has noted the efficient and professional manner in which the South African Independent Electoral Commission led by the chairperson, Dr Brigalia Bam conducted the election, thereby enhancing the integrity of the election process. Many officials worked long hours and their exhaustion became noticeable during the counting period. A few technical hitches such as late delivery of ballot papers, some voting stations running out of ballot papers, ballot boxes and VEC4 forms were noted. However this did not materially affect the overall smooth running of the election. SACSEC is satisfied and impressed by the high level of professionalism displayed by election officials. The use of modern technology played a major part in delivering a transparent election that we as a nation are proud of.

SACSEC commends and thanks our security forces for their effective service and presence during the entire election process. The combination of a strong and visible presence of security personnel, civil society peace groups and international observers bolstered the confidence of voters.

The maturity of the voting population contributed in a significant way towards the free and fairness of the election. Voters were generally enthusiastic and endured long queues. SACSEC noted the increased number of voters who registered and the efforts of the IEC to encourage voters between the age of

18 and 30 to register and cast their vote. Their decision to exercise the right to vote is appreciated. We are mindful that the right to vote has a painful history: we had to fight to attain this right. Young people are an expression of responsible citizenship and their behaviour augers well for the future of peace, stability and democracy in South Africa. This is an affirming sign that South Africans, young and old, take their responsibility to participate in the democratic process seriously.

SACSEC in particular notes the following:

Voter Education - SACSEC has noted the efforts by the IEC to provide voter education and to keep voters informed. However given the size of our country and the different levels of formal literacy, voter education remains a challenge. The main reason for spoilt ballots can largely be ascribed to the lack of voter education, notwithstanding that some voters may have chosen to spoil their paper. Long term civic education at community and in the formal and informal education environment should be undertaken consistently and in a sustained way.

Election Coverage - The media played a commendable role in contributing to the transparency, freedom and fairness of the election. The SABC provided extensive debate and coverage on the elections to enable voters to make an informed choice. We are hopeful that such responsible reporting will continue in the post election phase.

Political party agents - SACSEC was impressed by the presence of political party agents in voting and counting stations and the general behaviour of all political parties during the campaign period and on the day of the election. We are however disturbed by some parties setting up tables too close to the voting station, while other parties engaged in distributing party literature at such points. Voters expressed their dissatisfaction to us while some felt intimidated by this close presence.

Voting day – Despite isolated incidents where ballot papers arrived late, for example at some stations in Gauteng and an incident reported in KwaZulu Natal where boxes of already marked ballots were found at one station, or

shortage of ballot boxes, ballot papers, for example in Gauteng and Western Cape, overall voting proceeded efficiently and these incidents were not sufficient to impact on the outcome of the election. The change in the electoral law to allow people to vote at any voting station and not just the one that they were registered at added to the logistical problems of both insufficient ballot papers and boxes at some stations.

Post election - While Election Day itself was peaceful ,there may be need for peace-building processes to continue after the election. This may also require Security Personnel to remain operative in some areas where the final election results may not be acceptable. All political parties have the responsibility of ensuring that their supporters abide by the Electoral Code of Conduct and act responsibly even after the results of the elections have been released.

SACSEC also wishes to express its appreciation to its sponsors, the Embassy of Finland and the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany. Without this support we would not have been able to provide such comprehensive observation of this important election.

In closing SACSEC would also like to thank each and every observer, both domestic and international, who so willingly gave of their time and conducted themselves in a responsible manner and showed great commitment to ensuring that the citizens of South Africa could have confidence in the electoral process. A final thank you goes to the people of South Africa, who once again showed their commitment to the democratic electoral process.

For more information contact The Revd Canon Luke Lungile Pato (083 357 3961) : SACSEC National Coordinator