



PRELIMINARY STATEMENT OF THE AFRICAN UNION OBSERVER MISSION ON THE ETHIOPIA LEGISLATIVE ELECTONS OF 23 May 2010

Introduction

In response to an invitation by the government of the People's Republic of Ethiopia, H.E. Mr. Jean Ping, the Chairperson of the African Union (AU) Commission to send an Observer Mission to Ethiopia for the country's legislative elections, a Mission was constituted and deployed from the 16 - 28 May 2010.

The deployment of the Mission is in keeping with the AU Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa, adopted by the Heads of State and Governments of member States in July 2002. The Principles, among others, affirm that democratic elections are the basis of authority of any representative government; and constitute a key element of the democratization process and, therefore are essential ingredients for the rule of law, maintenance and promotion of peace, security and stability in the continent.

The AU is committed to ensuring that the momentum of the ongoing democratization process in Ethiopia is sustained and further enhanced. As such, the overall objective of the AU Mission to the Ethiopia 2010 Legislative Elections was to uphold this mandate. The Mission is in the process of preparing a detailed independent and impartial assessment report that will cover various aspects of the electoral process in accordance with AU Guidelines and the relevant laws of the Republic of Ethiopia.

Composition of the Observer Mission

In keeping with the tradition and need to make its Observer Missions as diverse and representative as possible, the AU Mission to Ethiopia is drawn from among Pan-African Parliamentarians, National Parliaments, high-level officials of Election Management Bodies, prominent individuals, ECCOSOC and members of the Civil Society from various African countries.

The AU Observer Mission is composed of 59 Members and is led by **His Excellency Sir. Ketumile Masire**, the former President of Botswana, and has been on the ground from 16 – 28 May 2010. Members have been drawn from Botswana, Cameroun, Djibouti, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea- Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sahawari Republic, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, The Gambia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe and include parliamentarians, high-officials of national election management bodies, former ambassadors, prominent individuals, and members of civil society.

Mission Activities

The observer mission was preceded by a pre-election assessment mission. The Pre-Elections Assessment Mission in Ethiopia was conducted by a team of 4 independent persons between the 8th to the 13th of February 2010 in Addis Ababa. The purpose of the assessment mission was to determine whether the atmosphere was conducive for the holding of elections and also make the logistic necessary arrangements for the mission. The pre-election assessment mission also met with different electoral stakeholders.

Before deployment, the observers had a two-day briefing session where they were briefed by various electoral stakeholders, namely, the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), political parties, civil society organizations and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Ethiopia. The purpose of the briefing session was to learn about the country's electoral process from different

perspectives, and to identify areas or aspects of the electoral process that should be evaluated more closely in order to determine the credibility and legitimacy of the electoral process. The briefing also afforded the observers an opportunity of assessing the level of access to the Media by political parties, all in an attempt to gauge the level of democratic space accorded to the key actors to express and articulate their programmes and policy proposals to the electorate.

After the briefings in Addis Ababa, the AU Observer Mission deployed its 59 members, a total of 24 teams to all the regions and Addis Ababa City and Dire Dawa administrative areas. The Mission deployed 5 teams to Addis Ababa City (Addis Ababa region), and the rest of the teams to the following regions; Awash and Asaita (Afar); Bahir Dar and Gonder (Amhara); Asosa (Benishangul-Gumuz); Dire Dawa (Dire Dawa); Gambela (Gambela); Harari (Harari); Nazreth, Ambo and Jima (Oromiya); Jijiga (Somalia); Awasa (Southern Nations, Nationalists and People's Region); and Mekele and Aksum (Tigray)

This provided the Mission with the opportunity to get a representative sample of how the elections were organized and conducted, and how the votes were counted, tabulated and declared.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

1. Campaigns

Even though the official campaign period was still on by the time the AU mission arrived in the country, due to late deployment, they were unable to observe the campaigning. Nevertheless, some of the political parties that the AU Mission observers met expressed dissatisfaction with the general political environment in which the elections were being organized. They alleged that they had not been accorded equitable (media and physical) space and freedom they needed to campaign. However the AU had no way of verifying the allegations.

2. The Preparedness of the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE)

The briefing by the NEBE on the 17th May indicated that the Commission had been professional in its handling of the process leading to the elections and in accordance with the law.

It was also evident that the Commission had put in place the necessary mechanisms to ensure that electoral materials were distributed to the polling stations in time to enable the people cast their votes.

3. Polling Day Observations

- All the AU Observer Mission teams deployed in various parts of the country reported that the polling stations visited opened at 6.00 a.m. as is required by the law. The electoral materials were in place and not tampered with. The polling station opening procedures were observed.
- In all the polling stations visited the full complement of the election staff were deployed. The election officials were adequately knowledgeable and established procedures were followed.

- The Mission also noted that there were 5 public observers in all the polling stations. The candidates of ruling party had on-site representatives in almost all the polling stations visited by the AU teams, while in some polling stations candidates of opposition parties had no on-site representatives.
- Domestic observers were also present in almost all the polling stations visited by AU teams. Apart from the AU mission, the European Union observers were also present in the various parts of the country.
- Voter turn-out was remarkably high, with long queues of voters reported as early as 5.30 a.m. in some areas.
- In some of the polling stations where the AU teams observed there were substantial number of spoilt votes.
- The teams also observed that the canvass ballot boxes used were not voter-friendly; the size and the opening were too small.
- The ballot papers lacked adequate security features.
- The voters roll which is hand-written could be open to possible manipulation.
- The (manual) voters' card, lacked adequate security features.
- The uniform application of counting procedures and the enforcement of existing laws was observed to be lacking in some polling stations.
- The atmosphere was peaceful throughout the country.

Recommendations

- The code of conduct for campaigning should be strictly observed.
- There should be adequate voter and civic education before Election
- The ballot box should be improved upon in order to meet international standards.
- The ballot papers should have security features.
- The voters' register and voters' card should be improved to prevent possible manipulation.
- There should be an enabling environment for increased civil society participation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the African Union Observer Mission to the Legislative Elections in Ethiopia concludes that:

1. The overwhelming voter turnout indicated outstanding mobilization and sensitisation by the NEBE, political organizations and other stakeholders
2. Conditions existed for voters to freely express their will.
3. The Ethiopian Legislative Elections were organised and conducted in accordance with the constitutional and legal provisions and the rules and regulations governing the conduct of elections in the country and were largely consistent with AU guidelines and standards for the conduct of democratic elections.

It is recognized that 2010 Ethiopia's Legislative Elections reflected the will of the people. The AU Observer Mission congratulates the people of Ethiopia for their peaceful conduct and active participation in the electoral process.

**Issued at the AU Observer Mission Secretariat
Addis Ababa, Hilton Hotel
26th May 2010.**