



PRELIMINARY STATEMENT OF THE AFRICAN UNION ELECTORAL OBSERVER MISSION TO THE 26 MAY, 2012 NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS IN THE KINGDOM OF LESOTHO

A. INTRODUCTION

1. In response to the invitation of the Government of the Kingdom of Lesotho, and the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) of Lesotho, H. E. Jean Ping, Chairperson of the African Union (AU) Commission, dispatched an Electoral Observer Mission to observe the National Assembly elections, which were conducted on 26 May, 2012.
2. The AU Electoral Observer Mission is led by His Excellency General Dr. Yakubu Gowon, GCRF, former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The Mission is composed of twenty (20) members drawn from Elections Management Bodies (EMBs), African Ambassadors accredited to the African Union in Addis Ababa and members of Civil Society Organizations from various African countries.
3. The Mission Observers are drawn from Botswana, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The Mission is supported by a team of experts from the African Union Commission and the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA).
4. The AU Observer Mission arrived in Lesotho on 20 May, 2012 and will remain in the country until the 31 May, 2012.
5. The African Union electoral Observer Mission observed the 26 May 2012, National Assembly Elections within the spirit and letter of the Durban Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa, as adopted by the Assembly of the African Union in July 2002. The presence of this Observer Mission constitutes an unequivocal commitment of the African Union to contribute to the promotion and strengthening of democracy and the rule of law on our Continent.
6. The purpose of the Mission was to undertake an objective, independent and impartial observation of the 26 May, 2012 National Assembly elections.

B. PRE-ELECTION ACTIVITIES

7. In accordance with the African Union Guidelines for Election Observation and Monitoring, the Mission met and consulted with various Stakeholders involved in the electoral process. These included representatives of some Basotho Political Parties, the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), the Media and the Civil Society Organizations.
8. Members of the AU Electoral Observer Mission attended on 21 May, 2012 a briefing organized by the UNDP for International and Domestic Observers during which they exchanged information on the current political and security situation of the Kingdom of Lesotho, the level of preparedness of the IEC, as well as some logistic challenges ahead of the polls.
9. More particularly the AU electoral Observer Mission participated on 25 May 2012 in a Press Conference during which a Joint Appeal by SADC, AU, Commonwealth and EISA was released calling on all Basotho electors to exercise their democratic right and civic duty and participate massively and peacefully in the 26 May National Assembly elections. The joint Appeal also urged all Basotho stakeholders to accept the outcome of the elections in the interest of peace, brotherhood and national interest of Lesotho.
10. The African Union Mission deployed eight (8) teams to various locations throughout the country. The teams were deployed to the following Districts: Maseru, Berea, Mafeteng, Leribe, Butha Buthe, Thaba-Tseka, Qacha'snek, Mokhotlong and Quthing.
11. In light of these consultations and the findings of the teams, the African Union Observer Mission to the 26 May, 2012 National Assembly Elections in the Kingdom of Lesotho, makes the following observations and recommendations:

C. OBSERVATIONS

I. General Observations

- the pre-election process was generally peaceful and held in accordance with the Constitution and the electoral laws of the Kingdom of Lesotho;
- the campaign was, on the whole, conducted peacefully, in spite of some minor incidents of intolerance and violence between supporters of some political Parties;
- Political Parties that contested the 26 May, 2012 elections were funded proportionally in line with the measure of votes they received in the last elections of 2007;

- civic and voter education was carried out in all the ten (10) Districts of the Kingdom of Lesotho by the IEC in partnership with five (5) Civil Society Organizations;
- the number of female candidates in the National Assembly elections was minimal, as there were only about 237 women among the 1.044 candidates;

II. Election Day

12. The AU observer teams visited a total of 285 polling stations across the country and their preliminary assessment of the conduct of the voting is summarized as follows:

- a- the establishment of most polling centres in schools, churches and other public Institutions facilitated their identification and access;
- b- most polling stations opened on time (07:00 am);
- c- the electoral environment preceding voting and the actual voting was generally peaceful. No acts of violence or tension were reported in the polling stations and their immediate precincts;
- d- no campaign by political Parties or Candidates were observed or reported on the election day;
- e- there were IEC staff at all polling stations and they demonstrated sufficient knowledge and expertise on electoral operations;
- f- the overwhelming majority of IEC polling staff were women and young people;
- g- the voting process proceeded in accordance with the laid down procedures which included the verification of the voters' names in the register, the issuance of ballot papers, the marking with the indelible ink etc.
- h- the presence of the Agents of the Political Parties in all polling stations;
- i- the presence of domestic Observers mostly in Maseru and its surrounding area;
- j- a proper layout of polling stations and polling booths guaranteed the secrecy of the vote;
- k- the counting and tallying of votes was open and transparent;
- l- the presence of security personnel, mainly Police forces, at all polling centres;

13. However, the AU Observer Mission noted the following shortcomings:

- a- the long distances between polling stations in rural and mountainous regions;
- b- the voting process was slow in some Constituencies due to the cumbersome handling of ballot papers;
- c- the poor lighting in certain polling stations during the counting and tallying process;
- d- the relative low turn out.

D. RECOMMENDATIONS

14. Based on the observations and findings made by its various teams, the African Union Electoral Observer Mission to the 26 May, 2012 National Assembly elections in the Kingdom of Lesotho would like to make the following recommendations:
- a- undertake to reduce the distances between polling stations in rural and mountainous areas in order to facilitate the voting process;
 - b- maintain and improve the training of electoral officials in order to enhance their performance;
 - c- provide better lighting of polling stations;
 - d- maintain the civic and electoral education aiming at increasing the rate of participation of the electorate;
 - e- effort should be intensified by all Basotho political leaders to increase the number of female candidates for elective posts.

E. CONCLUSION

15. In view of the aforementioned and notwithstanding the few shortcomings, the AU Electoral Observer Mission notes that the 26 May, 2012 National Assembly elections in the Kingdom of Lesotho were conducted in accordance with the legal and constitutional framework of the Country and the Durban Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa, as adopted by the Assembly of the African Union in July 2002.
16. The AU electoral Observer Mission consequently concludes that the 26 May, 2012 National Assembly Elections in the Kingdom of Lesotho were peaceful, free, fair and credible.
17. It also wishes to commend the IEC, the Security Agencies and all Stakeholders involved in the electoral process, for the peaceful conduct of the 26 May, 2012 National Assembly Elections
18. The African Union electoral Observer Mission wishes to acclaim and congratulate the people of the Kingdom of Lesotho, Political Parties and the Candidates for their political maturity. The Mission further urges them to continue to abide by the letter and spirit of their pledge of 27 April 2012.

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