



**Election Observation Mission to the  
Presidential and Parliamentary Elections  
22-24 October, 2020**

**PRELIMINARY STATEMENT**

Delivered by Mr. Gerard Lim Sam,  
Mission Leader & Chairperson of CDWS

Wednesday 28th October 2020

CARE House | Victoria | Seychelles

Mr. Matthew Harper, Deputy High Commissioner,  
Mrs. Marie-Annette Ernesta, Political Analyst , US Embassy  
Mrs. Nichole Tirant-Gerardhi – Ombudsman  
Mr. Danny Lucas, Chairperson and Mrs. Manuella Amesbury CEO of Electoral Commission  
Justice Bernadin Renaud, Chairperson of Human Rights Commission  
Distinguish guests  
Media partners, fellow observers  
Ladies and gentlemen

A very good morning to you all,

In my capacity as the Mission Leader, I am honoured to present to you, the CDWS Election Observer Mission's preliminary assessment of the electoral processes for the Seychelles' Presidential and Parliamentary elections held on 22,23,24 October 2020.

In preparation for its observation mission, CDWS organised a three-day training for newly recruited observers. The main objective of the training was to enhance stakeholders understanding of the electoral processes and prepare observers for observation duties across the country before deployment.

The CDWS observer mission was officially launched on 10th October, 2020 during which observers took their oath to undertake their duties in adherence to the code of conduct for observers.

### **Deployment Strategy**

Since the proclamation of the Presidential and Parliamentary elections, CDWS observers have been visible in various parts of the country interacting with key stakeholders, observing voter registration, nomination day, campaigning, voting process, transfer of ballots, sorting of ballots cast at special polling stations as well as media monitoring.

The scope of observation was not restricted to the polling stations; additionally our observers patrolled the communities and responded to complaints and reports of alleged illegal activities, received through its hotline service. The mission was comprised of 31 observers, 21 were women and 10 men. As part of its deployment strategy, nine (9) teams were deployed to 10 special polling stations and all 26 stations on the main polling day.

CDWS based its observations on the provisions of the Elections Act of Seychelles and the SADC Principles & Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections. The Mission wishes to share its preliminary observations, findings and recommendations for further consolidation of our country's democratic electoral processes.

## **Preliminary Findings of the Mission**

### **The Electoral Commission and Election Administration**

The Mission appreciates the efforts made by the Electoral Commission for organising both elections despite facing several challenges, for instance, the implementation of the mandatory requirements imposed by the Public Health Authority, due to Covid-19 pandemic. One of the challenges facing the electoral commission is the limited experience of the newly recruited team in the management of elections. However, there was commitment to deliver.

### **Voter Education**

Civic and voter education are indispensable to democratic consolidation, as they allow for the electorate to make informed choices on who decides on their governance priorities. The Mission recognizes the efforts made by the Electoral Commission to educate voters, however, the mission concluded that quality of civic and voter education were inadequate and short-term. The mission feel that the EC should have a continuous voter education throughout the election cycle.

### **Voter Registration**

The mission noted that the voters register remained closed as stipulated in the Elections Act. Through various consultations the stakeholders expressed concerns about disenfranchisement of voters, people with special needs and remanded persons.

The mission notes the reluctance on the part of the Electoral Commission to engage with civil society partners in the implementation of the YouthRegister2Vote project initiated by the Seychelles National Youth Assembly and CDWS. This project had for aim to encourage young voters to participate in an informed and responsible manner in the electoral process: To register and to vote

### **Nomination Day**

Stakeholders consulted expressed concern about the administration of documents required for nomination day. Some stakeholders are of the view that there should be more flexibility and more time allocated for verification of nomination documents by the Electoral Commission and that the process should facilitate rather than prohibit the right of a person to stand as a candidate.

### **Accreditation**

CDWS notes that there were discrepancies and inconsistency in the accreditation process of observers. Through consultations undertaken, some stakeholders expressed concerns about delays in processing accreditation of stakeholders (parties).

## **Campaigning**

One of the fundamental principles of multi-party democracy and political development process is that of freedom of association and expression. The mission noted that the dissolution of the national assembly and the proclamation of the general elections generated stiff political competition, tension and anxiety amongst the parties and their supporters.

The campaign period was marked with verbal or physical acts of provocation, alleged intimidation and threats, defacing of billboards, fear-mongering and hate speech / abusive languages. The mission also noted that on polling day some voters received phone calls urging them to cast their vote in a particular way and in some instances SMS requesting them to refrain from voting.

The Mission observed that the regulations pertaining to the affixing of posters and billboards were not necessarily adhered to. Stakeholders brought to the attention of CDWS that the complaint mechanism put in place by Electoral Commission was not effective. The mission also observed that in some instances, the social distancing measures were not adhered to by political parties.

## **Use of State Resources**

The mission received reports of alleged abuse of state resources including the time of some civil servants for campaigning while they were working in their official capacities.

## **Media Access and coverage**

The media plays an essential role in fostering and upholding democratic societies. The mission observed that the state-funded national broadcaster the Seychelles Broadcasting Cooperation (SBC) was fairly impartial and that airtime was allocated for Party Political Broadcast (PPB's) as specified by law. However, CDWS notes the discrepancies in the law that discriminates against independent candidates, allocating less airtime to them compared to political parties. Two presidential debates, and profiles of the candidates played a major role in informing voters about the three candidates lives as well as their plans and programs. CDWS is of the opinion that airtime for independent candidates should be equitable as that of other parties.

The mission observed that there was extensive coverage of elections in the private broadcast and print media and there was wide usage of social media for campaigning by political parties and citizens. CDWS notes that there was a new code of conduct for journalist which was challenged by the Association for Media Practitioners. CDWS observed that there were inconsistencies in adhering to the regulation for photographing and filming inside polling stations.

## **Security Forces**

CDWS commends the Police for its professionalism in response to reported and observed cases throughout the electoral process. In some cases, their presence was quite noticeable and unobtrusive. However the mission notes that the Police played a more passive role at the polling stations in view of new instructions.

## **Polling Day Observations**

Majority of special voting stations did not open and close on time as prescribed by law. The Mission notes that delays in opening were compensated to allow voters to exercise their right. The opening and closing procedures took place in accordance with the provisions of the Elections Act.

CDWS notes that some voters were turned away as their names were not on the master register and that a group of employees based on Aldabra were not able to exercise their right due to prevailing bad weather. The mission also notes that due to administrative issues, one of the employees who was not on Aldabra was turned away when he presented himself to vote at his designated polling station on the main polling day.

## **Location and layout of Polling Stations**

The location and layout in most polling stations were generally satisfactory. However, it was observed that at some polling stations:

- The location and topography of some polling stations were not always conducive and secure.
- The layout of some polling stations promoted easy flow in the voting process, however it was observed in some polling stations the layout was confusing.
- There was a lack of consistency in queue management, no clear demarcation or signage for queuing
- The positioning of the polling booths compromised the secrecy of the ballot,
- All polling stations had wheelchair accessible, facilitating access for disabled voters

## **Election Materials**

- Election materials were available in most polling stations, there were unacceptable shortages of ballot papers in many polling stations causing unnecessary delay of the voting process
- Ballot papers were transported in a pickup in an insecure manner.

- Inadequate copies of master register for use at the special stations and sub-facilities on the main polling day
- Inaccurate list of voters for special polling which resulted in unacceptable delays and inconvenience.
- Management of the special stations for essential services was not in line with provisions of the Elections Act.
- Voters at special polling stations had difficulties in sealing envelopes
- The manner in which the sensitive election materials was handled was unacceptable and unlawful. (For instance, the materials left behind at Beau Vallon as well as the manner in which ballot papers were distributed from one voting point to another at English River Special Station.

### **Voting Procedures**

The mission noted some inconsistencies in the application of voting procedures namely:

- Identification of voters
- UV verification
- Handling and issuing of ballot papers to voters was not uniform in all the stations
- Sealing of ballot boxes
- Sorting and Counting procedures

The mission recognize the continued efforts to assist and respect the dignity of incapacitated voters and the elderly. However, CDWS observed certain challenges in regards to incapacitated voters who required assistance to vote.

### **Sorting and Classification of ballots from Special Stations**

The mission notes that the process was done in a transparent manner, despite long delays. The mission observed that there were inadequate human resources to undertake the task given that there were two simultaneous elections. Some discrepancies were observed in the tallying of ballot envelopes and the list of voters from special polling stations.

Party agents were present in all polling stations, but observers were often absent as there were not enough observers for all polling stations. However, the mission witnessed that in few instances, some party agents were seen to be interfering with the work of presiding officers.

A number of checkpoints were identified where there were alleged vote buying and voter intimidation. The mission noted and observed political activists loitering and interfering with

voters within the precincts of the polling stations. Some political activist accompanied incapacitated voters more than twice to the polling station and they exploited the stream system.

### **Polling Staff**

CDWS noted that additional personnel were recruited to service the polling stations. However, there are concerns concerning the impartiality and independence of some of the staff working at different polling stations as some are known-political activists and were seen sporting party regalia during recent campaign meetings and also expressing support for a political party or another on their social media account.

### **Counting, Tabulation and Announcement of results**

Most Presiding Officers generally adhered to counting procedures. CDWS observers and party agents were present throughout the process. CDWS noted unnecessary delays in the counting of votes and recommends that the Electoral Commission establishes a time frame that counting should after closing of the polling station. The mission observed that there were some challenges in reconciling the ballot paper account.

### **Announcement of Results**

The mission also noted that there were long delays in the announcement of the results which took place at the Electoral Commission Headquarters. Some results were announced over 12 hours after the closure of polling stations. However, the mission noted errors in the presentation of results. CDWS also notes that the swearing in ceremony of the President-elect was held on Monday 26<sup>th</sup> October 2020.

### **Conclusion**

Our preliminary assessment is that the elections were conducted in a generally peaceful atmosphere and transparent manner. At this juncture, CDWS will continue to observe the post-election phase and will submit its final report and recommendations within the next 30 days.

Once again, the CDWS recognises the efforts of the Electoral Commission in organising the general elections within such a short period. CDWS congratulates the citizens of Seychelles for the peaceful conduct of the elections. The Citizens Democracy Watch Seychelles (CDWS) reaffirms its commitment to actively engage and promote the fundamental principles of democracy and good governance.

CDWS encourages all Seychellois to continue playing a constructive role in strengthening our country's democratic processes, bearing in mind that a credible and legitimate election is a key building block towards political stability, democratic governance and socio-economic development.

As mission Leader, I wish to express my heartfelt appreciation to all observers for their dedication throughout the process and our families for all support provided. CDWS is grateful to its esteemed partners and sympathizers for the continued collaboration and support.

I thank you for your attention.

Gerard Lim Sam

Mission Leader

Chairperson - Citizens Democracy Watch Seychelles (CDWS)