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ELECTORAL COMMISSIONS FORUM OF SADC COUNTRIES

THE OBSERVATION STATEMENT SUBMITTED TO THE INDEPENDENT ELECTORAL COMMISSION OF BOTSWANA

INTRODUCTION

The Electoral Commissions Forum (ECF) of the SADC countries received an invitation letter from the Independent Electoral Commission of Botswana dated 8th September 2009 to observe the Botswana General Elections to be held on the 16th October 2009 in the Republic of Botswana.

In response to this invitation, the ECF duly deployed to Botswana a 26 Member Observer Mission.

The Mission hereby presents this statement on its observations. A full report will be availed at a later stage.

The ECF Mandate

The ECF, comprising all 14 SADC member states' Electoral Commissions, was launched in July 1998 and is governed by a Constitution. Among its various functions and activities, the ECF's mandate includes the following:

- To strengthen co-operation amongst Electoral Commissions in the SADC region;
- To promote conditions conducive to free, fair and transparent elections in the SADC region;

The ECF views election observation as an important component of promoting democratic elections and consolidating democracy in the SADC Region. The rationale behind the Forum observing elections, therefore, is to assist fellow Election Management Bodies identify areas needing improvement in elections administration

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Forum Presidency: Rev A. Malumalu - President (DRC), Justice A. Msosa -Vice President (Malawi)
EXCO: Chairperson: Justice F. Mumba (Zambia), - **Vice Chairperson:** Chief S.G Dlamini (Swaziland), Justice A.C P.C. de Sousa (Angola) Justice S. Gaongalelwe (Botswana) Mr A Rahman (Mauritius) M.K. Mwinyichande (Zanzibar) Justice G. Chiweshe (Zimbabwe)

Mission Composition and Structure

The Electoral Commissions represented in the Observer Mission were Democratic Republic of Congo , Lesotho ,Malawi ,Namibia , South Africa,, Swaziland ,Zambia and Zimbabwe , with the first delegates arriving in Gaborone on the 7th October 2009. (*See Annex for list of Mission Members.*)

The Mission was led by Mrs Limakatso Mokhothu , Chairperson of the Independent Electoral Commission of Lesotho.

Pre-Poll Mission activities

The Mission met with the following stakeholders:

- (a) The IEC-Botswana which provided the Mission with a comprehensive brief on their preparedness and readiness to conduct the election;
- (b) Political parties representatives, media institutions, civil society organizations and Non Governmental Organizations who briefed the Mission on how the preparations regarding elections were conducted. The stakeholders generally expressed satisfaction on the level of their involvement at all stages of the electoral process. The seminar with stakeholders proved very informative in understanding the various perspectives on the 2009 elections.
- (c) The African Union which organized a meeting for Heads of Missions and facilitated notes sharing by the missions.

The Mission also arranged the following visits:

- to the IEC-Botswana Head Office to appreciate the functions of the key departments especially the Information Technology, Voter Education and Broadcasting sections.
- to the new IEC-Botswana office which is currently unoccupied.
- to the IEC-Botswana warehouse where election materials were checked and dispatched to the various constituencies.
- Observation of political rallies by contesting political parties.

Deployment

The Mission divided itself into seven teams to cover twenty of the fifty-seven constituencies of Botswana.

All the teams managed to make pre-poll visits in their assigned Constituencies to familiarize themselves with the location of the Polling Stations and to observe pre- election activities.

Overview on the Poll

The Mission observed the following on polling day:

- Most polling stations opened on time.
- Voting went smoothly but was painfully slow in most polling stations.
- The voting stations were adequately staffed with officers who appeared trained.

- Polling staff had difficulties using the voters roll and this slowed the voting process
- The voters were able to cast their ballots without difficulty.
- The secrecy of the ballot was safe guarded.
- In most voting stations visited observers were present when voting started at 630 am.
- Party Agents were present in the voting stations visited.
- The signage regarding polling stations was visibly displayed and not available in some polling stations.
- The police were visibly present at the polling stations to provide security.
- The conduct of the elections was orderly and peaceful.
- There was a high turn-out of voters at some polling stations.
- The elderly voters were given first preference at some polling stations.
- There was public media coverage of the polling day.
- The verification process was slow and this delayed counting.

In relation to the above observations, the Mission recommends the following to the Independent Electoral Commission:

- Transparent ballot boxes should be used, as it is a general practice in the SADC region
- That there should be consistency and standard practice in polling procedures at all polling stations.
- That the voters roll be arranged alphabetically or numerically to facilitate the voting process
- Depending on the number of registered voters, the Commission could increase the number of voting streams to reduce waiting time for the voter.
- Consideration of a national election results centre.
- Consideration to count at polling stations rather than at selected counting centres.
- Introduction of an electronic logistical data base or an improved system at the ware house.
- Deployment of polling officials in constituencies where they are registered to vote.
- Use of photos in the accreditation of observers for easy identification.

Conclusion

The Mission observed that generally the preparations for the conduct of elections were in place and this assisted the people of Botswana to exercise their Constitutional Right to vote.

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Limakatso Mokhothu
Mission Leader
Electoral Commission Forum of SADC countries

18th October 2009, Gaborone, Botswana.

Annexure A: List of ECF-SADC Delegates

Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC Countries Observer Mission to Botswana– 2009				
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