



PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

BY

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OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE OF THE
REPUBLIC OF ZIMBABWE**

AND

HEAD OF THE SADC ELECTORAL OBSERVATION MISSION (SEOM)

TO

THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS

IN

THE REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA

GABORONE, 25 OCTOBER 2019

Honourable Patrick Chinamasa, Alternate Head of the SADC Electoral Observation Mission to the Republic of Botswana;

Your Excellency, Jallow Tambajang Fatoumata, former Vice-President of the Republic of the Gambia and Head of the African Union Electoral Observation Mission to the Republic of Botswana;

Ms Winnie Magagula, Deputy Chairperson of the Elections & Boundaries Commission of the Kingdom of Eswatini and Head of the SADC Electoral Commissions Forum Election Observation Mission to the Republic of Botswana;

Mr Koffi Sawyer, representing the Commonwealth Secretariat Technical Mission

Distinguished Members of the SADC Organ Troika;

Director of the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Affairs, representing Dr Stergomena Lawrence Tax, Executive Secretary of SADC;

Chairperson/Representative and Members of the Independent Electoral Commission of the Republic of Botswana;

Distinguished Heads of International Electoral Observation Missions;

Your Excellencies, Heads and Representatives of the Diplomatic Missions accredited to the Republic of Botswana;

Members of the SADC Electoral Advisory Council;

SADC Election Observers;

Leaders and Representatives of Political Parties;

Representatives of Local Election Observers;

Leaders of Faith-based Organisations and Members of the Civil Society;

Members of the media;

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I. INTRODUCTION

On behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and as mandated by His Excellency Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa, President of the Republic of Zimbabwe and the Chairperson of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation, it is my honour to welcome you to this important event of the release of the Preliminary Statement of the SADC Electoral Observation Mission (SEOM) on the conduct of the 23rd October 2019 General Elections in the Republic of Botswana.

The Mission observed the elections, with a total composition of fifty-five (55) personnel, who were deployed to ten (10) administrative districts of the country which account for over 80% of the population, namely; Central; Chobe; Gaborone City; Ghanzi; Kgalagadi; Kgatleng; Kweneng; Ngamiland; North-East; and Southern Districts. On election day, the Mission covered a total of 151 polling stations, of which 49.7% were urban, and 50.7% were rural.

As part of its mandate, the Mission engaged key stakeholders in Botswana, including government departments, political parties, civil society, faith-based organisations, academia, the media and the IEC.

The observation of the national elections in the region is governed by the Revised SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections (2015).

This Preliminary Report covers the Mission's observation of the pre-election process, voting day and counting. The Final Report will include our observations of the post-election processes, which include the results management and announcement processes.

II. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The SEOM observed the following aspects of best practice:

(i) The Political and Security Environment

The political and security environment before, during, and immediately after polling day was calm and peaceful. The Mission also observed a highly commendable and exemplary degree of political tolerance and maturity, whereby even leaders and supporters of opposing political parties attended each other's rallies without any incident. Our Mission

witnessed numerous rallies across the country. These were well attended and lively events, and during the campaign period the electorate were free to air their views without any restrictions.

In addition, the Mission observed that the Botswana Police Service, through their community policing, have built very good relations with the public and communities across the country.

(ii) Management of the Electoral Process

The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) managed the elections efficiently and delivered on the following:

- a) Establishment of 2,296 polling stations and publication of the exact locations of these polling stations ahead of the elections. These included 36 polling stations outside Botswana, to cater for the diaspora vote in 20 countries in Africa, Europe, Americas, and Australia where registered Botswana voters are resident; and
- b) Conducting diaspora voting on 12th October 2019, and on 19th October 2019 special voting for specific public officials who were involved in the conduct of the elections on election day. Both voting events served as a platform to enhance service delivery by the IEC on election day.

The Mission also noted that, through the All Party Conference, political parties are involved in the nominations of five individuals to be appointed to the IEC by the Judicial Services Commission, thus lending a broad stakeholder participation in the composition of the Election Management Body.

(iii) Role of the State and Private Media

The Mission observed a tremendous improvement in the manner with which the State-owned media covered the contesting parties and candidates when compared to the situation in the 2014 General Elections. State-owned media gave unbiased coverage to the campaign events of all relevant political stakeholders. Private radio stations also provided live political debates across the country in a manner that enhanced the public's interest in the elections. Further, for the first time, the public broadcaster, Botswana Television (*Btv*) aired a live debate of the four presidential candidates.

III. OBSERVATIONS ON ELECTION DAY

On election day the Mission observed the following at the 151 Polling Stations that the Mission visited:

- (i) The atmosphere was orderly, calm and peaceful at all polling stations and uniformed police were discreetly visible and professional at all the polling stations.
- (ii) All polling stations opened on time and all opening procedures were duly followed.
- (iii) No major incidences of concern were observed; minor disturbances were however observed at polling stations that were located within the vicinity of bars.
- (iv) A help desk for voters was available at 90% of the polling stations.

- (v) In some polling centres with more than one polling station there was inadequate direction signage to appropriately assist voters to identify the correct polling station. This caused some initial confusion amongst voters.
- (vi) All polling stations were accessible to all voters including people with disabilities, however at a number of polling stations voters with disabilities and pregnant women were not given priority to vote and those requiring assistance were not being assisted. At some polling stations sympathetic voters voluntarily created priority queues for the disabled, infirm, and expecting mothers.
- (vii) Voter education materials, such as posters were posted outside at only 50% of the polling stations.
- (viii) The voters register was displayed outside at 70% of the polling stations.
- (ix) All essential election materials in the correct quantity were available at 90% of the polling stations at the opening of the polls, and at 99% of the polling stations during the rest of the day.
- (x) Women formed the majority of returning, presiding, polling and counting officers, as well as political party agents.
- (xi) Local and international observers were present at 90% of the polling stations at closing time and they were allowed to observe closing procedures.
- (xii) 80% of the polling stations closed on time, the rest closed on average an hour later as voters were still in the queues, all such voters were allowed to vote. Two (2)

polling stations in Kanye and Serowe closed at 2352hrs and 2304hrs respectively. Closing procedures were duly followed at all polling stations.

(xiii) After the close of polling, the ballot boxes for the National Assembly and Local Government Elections were transferred to their respective counting centres.

(xiv) IEC staff at the polling stations observed were generally well prepared and professional.

IV. AREAS OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESS THAT REQUIRE IMPROVEMENT

Our Mission also observed the following areas of the electoral process and system that require improvement:

(a) Voter registration and voter education

The total population of Botswana is 2.2 million, of this 1,592, 350 are eligible voters and the IEC targeted to register 1,273, 880 voters. The actual figure achieved for the 2019 elections was 925, 478 registered voters. The total voter registrations in 2019 were marginally lower at 73%, than in 2014 where it was 77% of the total eligible voters. This is reflective of voter apathy.

The Mission noted that the Electoral Act does not make provision for the continuous registration of voters up to the cut-off date before an election. Further, the IEC has no legal mandate to conduct voter education, and consequently lacks dedicated funding for this purpose; it is the observation of the Mission that more could have been done by the IEC and all relevant stakeholders in conducting voter education.

(b) Gender representation

While women account for 55% of registered voters in Botswana, the 2019 elections represent a downward shift in the representation of women in political leadership, particularly at the National Assembly level.

In the 2014 elections Botswana registered five female Members of Parliament, four of whom were elected at their constituencies, and one was specially elected. This brought the percentage of female parliamentarians after the 2014 elections to 8.7% of the total. Furthermore, in the 2014 elections, out of a total of 192 Parliamentary candidates, 17 were female, representing 8.9%.

In 2019, however, only 11 out of 210 Parliamentary candidates were women, representing 5% of the total, which demonstrates a downward shift from the gains of 2014. This requires national reflection to address the gender imbalance in politics.

(c) Role of Traditional Leaders

The Mission observed that traditional leaders, particularly the Chiefs, have multiple roles which include an overlap between executive, judicial, and legislative powers. Above this some traditional leaders are also politicians, and even where they are not politicians they exercise a significant influence in the political/voting choices of their subjects, which may not be desirable in the democratic context.

(d) Counting of votes

The Electoral Act provides for polling station-based voter registration and voting, and once polling is closed, for the transportation of ballot boxes to counting centres across the country. The Mission noted that this procedure exposes the ballot boxes to insecurity in the process of movements between polling stations and counting centres. The Mission noted that the Electoral Act does not make provision for the less risky and more transparent system whereby ballots are counted at each polling station and provisional results are posted outside polling stations for the benefit of all stakeholders.

(e) Regulation of campaign funding

The Electoral Act limits campaign expenditure to a maximum of P50,000 per candidate. In reality, however, the law and the limits imposed therein are not reflective of the existing dynamics observed in the current financing of political party campaign activities. The injection of foreign money has the potential to cause undue influence and external interference in domestic politics thereby compromising the sovereignty of the country.

(e) Access to electoral information

The Mission took note that given modern dependence on information and communication technology, access to critical electoral information from the IEC is generally limited.

(f) Non-use of indelible ink and of translucent ballot boxes

The Mission noted that the Electoral Act does not provide for the use of indelible ink to mark each voter as a measure of preventing double or multiple voting. Further, the law does not provide for the use of

translucent ballot boxes to enhance the transparency of the electoral process.

V. SEOM RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the Mission's observations, and considering issues highlighted by various stakeholders, the SEOM recommends the following for the improvement of the electoral process in the Republic of Botswana:

- (i) **Voter registration and education:** In order to improve voter registration and voter turn-out during elections, the Government is urged to amend the Electoral Act in order to make provision for the continuous registration of voters up to the cut-off date before an election; and to legally mandate and financially empower the IEC to conduct voter education. In addition, the issue of voter apathy should be duly addressed by all stakeholders.
- (ii) **Gender representation:** All stakeholders and the Government are urged to take measures to address the gender imbalances in elected political positions, particularly at the level of the National Assembly. Although this may require comprehensive constitutional amendments, political parties are also urged to take the lead and implement affirmative measures. This will be in conformity with the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (2016) and the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections (2015).
- (iii) **Role of Traditional Leaders in politics:** The Government is urged to institute national consultations to review the role that

traditional leaders may play in politics given their current multiple roles.

- (iv) **Counting of votes:** Consideration should be given to amending the Electoral Act to make provision for polling station-based counting and displaying of results at the polling station.
- (v) **Regulation of Political Parties funding:** The Government and all stakeholders are urged to consider consultations on the possible regulation of political party financing, particularly in the context of regulating private foreign funding and the safeguards that may be adopted in the national interest.
- (vi) **Access to electoral information:** The IEC is urged to enhance its communication with stakeholders and the public, especially by reviewing and updating the content on its information communication technology platforms.
- (vii) **Assistance to certain voters:** There is need for the IEC to develop and implement general standards on how the polling staff can assist and prioritise voters who require assistance, such as the disabled, elderly and expecting mothers.
- (viii) **Location of some polling stations:** Polling stations should be located far from bars and other places where alcohol is consumed.
- (ix) **Use of indelible ink and of translucent ballot boxes:** The Government is urged to amend the Electoral Act to make provision for the use of indelible ink to minimise the possibility of double or

multiple voting, as well as to adopt the use of translucent ballot boxes to enhance the transparency of the electoral process.

VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the SEOM observed that the pre-election and voting phases of the 2019 General Elections were well organised and were conducted in a peaceful and free atmosphere, and the environment enabled the voters to express themselves in a transparent manner.

The Mission commends the IEC for the professional manner in which they conducted the elections, and the people of Botswana for the political maturity demonstrated during the electoral process. The Mission urges Botswana to maintain this spirit until the conclusion of the process when the results of the elections are announced, and after, and to implement the above recommendations in preparation for the next electoral cycle.

In accordance with the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections (2015) our Final Report will be issued within 30 days of this Preliminary Statement.

Thank you very much

Muito Obrigado

Merci beaucoup

Asante Sana

Kealeboga