



PRESS RELEASE

EAC –COMESA - IGAD OBSERVER MISSION INTERIM REPORT OF 2011 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

20TH February, 2011

Introduction

Following the invitation by the Electoral Commission of Uganda to come and observe the 2011 General elections, the East African Community (EAC), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) deployed a 70-member joint Election Observer Mission to the 2011 General Elections in the Republic of Uganda held on Friday 18 February 2011.

The constitutive treaties of the three Regional Organisations acknowledge that consolidating good governance and democracy is a prerequisite for successful regional integration. Most of all, the Republic of Uganda is a member of the three organisations.

The Mission was under the joint leadership of Honourable Nassor Sebtuu (EAC), Ambassador Hussein Dado (IGAD) and Ambassador Simbi Mubako (COMESA). The joint Mission was drawn from 14 African countries namely Burundi, Djibouti, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Stakeholder Briefings

The joint Mission held training on 11th February 2011 to equip Observers with skills and knowledge on the effective conduct of international election observation conducted by the Electoral Institute for the Sustainability of Democracy in Africa (EISA).

Deployment

The 70 EAC-COMESA-IGAD Observers were deployed in five regions of Uganda namely North, East, South, West and Central.

A total of 19 teams were deployed in various towns including Kitgum, Lira, Gulu, Tororo, Mbale, Jinja, Fort Portal, Hoima, Masindi, Kabale, Rukungiri, Mbarara, Mukono, Luwero, Entebbe, Kayunga and Kampala.

Campaign Process

In areas observed, most campaigns were generally peaceful despite few isolated incidences of tension and violence such as happened in Tororo, Masaka and Lira. In Tororo, the mission observed clashes between supporters of two contesting candidates. Tensions observed in this area had an ethnic tone.

Role of the Media in the electoral process

The media has improved in the coverage of the 2011 electoral process in comparison to the 2006 general elections. Candidates to the 2011 elections have received good coverage in spite of complaints from opposition candidates over unbalanced and biased public media reporting.

For the 2011 general elections, the media has been instrumental in mobilising the electorate through massive voter sensitization and education campaigns undertaken on national radio, television, newspapers and social media. The Mission commends the media for this effort in educating the voters.

Registration of Voters and Voters Roll

Although the joint mission did not observe the voter registration exercise, it has noted complaints expressed by voters on the credibility and accuracy of the voter register. Incidences of “missing” names, double registration, and some voters not identifying or accessing their respective polling stations with ease were observed.

The Voting Process

The Mission observed that most polling centres visited by the teams opened after the official opening time of 7.00 a.m. This was mostly due to late delivery of election materials. In contrast, an isolated incidence was observed in a polling station in Kampala (Summit View polling station) which opened at 6.30am contrary to the provisions of the electoral code.

In most polling stations visited, some teams observed general low voter turnout in the first six hours of voting; less than 50% of the voters had cast their votes; In some places such as Mbale, the team observed a few incidences of violence.

There was high presence of military personnel in fatigue uniforms which may have intimidated and frightened some voters. The capacity of the Election polling personnel to manage the voting process was inadequate. In some cases they did not have sufficient knowledge and skills on voting operations.

This was exemplified by slow voting process, unsealed ballot boxes and abdicating the role of guiding assisted voters to unauthorised personnel including the police and members of the public; Even though the open air voting lends itself a transparent voting process, it however compromises the secrecy of the ballot as witnessed in some areas. In certain cases, rain interfered with the voting process;

The Counting Process and Recommendations

The Mission observed that the counting of votes was generally, transparent, done in the presence of political parties Agents and Observers.

Recommendations:-

- a) There is need for the Electoral Commission to conduct intensive training of its personnel on electoral process to enhance the capacity and competence of polling officers; And there is need to further improve the management and application of the voters register to minimize incidences of “missing” names, double registration and problems of some voters not identifying or accessing their respective polling stations on polling day;

b) There is need for serialisation of ballot boxes, dispatched to various polling stations for authenticity; And there is need for media reforms and capacity building in view of the complaints levelled by some political parties over impartial campaign coverage by public media; and The Electoral Commission should re-examine the concept of open space polling station in that although it enhances transparency, it is susceptible to abuse, unfavourable weather and compromises the secrecy of the ballot.

While noting the need to address the shortcomings cited above, the mission concludes that as of today 20th February 2011, the Ugandan presidential and parliamentary elections have been conducted in conformity with minimum international benchmarks for free elections. The Mission commends and urges the people of Uganda to sustain the peace that characterized the entire election period.

Joint Mission Leaders

Hon. Sebtuu Nassor (for EAC)

Ambassador Simbi Mubako (for COMESA)

Ambassador Hussein Dado (for IGAD)

For More Information Contact:-

For EAC: Ms Isabelle Waffubwa, Tel: +256 787 927942 Email: lwaffubwa@eachq.org

For COMESA: Tel: +260 211 229725 Email: legal@comesa.int

For IGAD: Mr. Yufnalis Okubo, Tel: +254 722 516423 Email: yufnalis.okuba@igad.int