



PRELIMINARY STATEMENT ISSUED BY THE CARICOM ELECTORAL OBSERVER TEAM TO ST. KITTS AND NEVIS GENERAL ELECTIONS, 25 OCTOBER 2004

The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Electoral Observer Mission was mounted in response to a request made by the Government of St Kitts and Nevis for electoral observers to be present at the Elections held on Monday, 25 October 2004.

The Terms of Reference of the Observer Mission were to monitor the processes employed in the build up to the elections; observe the execution of the electoral process; make an assessment of the electoral process; and submit a report to the Secretary-General.

The Mission's advance party, the Core Group, arrived in St Kitts on 19th October 2004 and proceeded to formulate an itinerary of meetings with key stakeholders in the social and political spheres of the country. The Mission was brought up to its full strength on 22nd October 2004 with the arrival of the two persons comprising the Observer Team.

In giving effect to its itinerary, the Mission paid a courtesy call on His Excellency the Governor General, and held discussions with the Prime Minister, representatives of political parties, the Supervisor of Elections, representatives of the Chamber of Commerce, and church organizations. The Mission also held discussions with the Commissioner of Police, the Trades Union, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition Nevis Island Administration and representatives of youth groups. It also hosted a media conference.

During its discussions and consultations with the various groups, the Mission was apprised of the prevailing political climate, the state of preparedness for the elections, security concerns and other factors relative to the elections.

On Polling Day, one member of the CARICOM Electoral Observer Mission was deployed in Nevis whilst the others remained in St Kitts. The Mission was able to visit one hundred percent (100%) of the polling stations. It was also able to monitor the electoral processes from the distribution of ballot papers to the Returning Officers, up to the counting of ballots and the Preliminary Declaration of Results. The Mission was limited in its coverage of the count, which could only have been observed at four (4) counting centres.

The Mission undertook a spectrum of activities and it was afforded the opportunity to examine carefully the pre-poll, poll and post-poll electoral procedures and consequently make reasonable judgments and assessments to arrive at conclusions which will be submitted in full, in due course.

In the interim, it must be stated that there were some infractions of the Registration Rules with regard to the Registration of Voters in areas where they do not reside.

Prior to Polling Day, stakeholders expressed their fears of intimidation of voters and of violence breaking out in constituencies Nos.: 2, 4, 5, and 8. Fortunately, none of these fears was realised. The electorate turned out in reasonable numbers and exercised their franchise in fluctuating weather conditions in a peaceful and exemplary manner. The high quality of training given to members of the Poll Day staff was easily discernable in the efficient manner in which they executed their duties. This contributed immeasurably to the free expression of the will of the people. It is for this reason that the mission wishes to compliment the Supervisor of Elections, his staff and the electorate for the decorum and dignity exhibited during the polls.

During the Mission's pre-election consultations, many groups bemoaned the absence of the requirement for voters to identify themselves at the polls because the only step taken when doubt and uncertainty arose about an elector's identity, or when a challenge was made by a polling agent, was the making of a declaration by the elector as to the veracity of his/her claim to be the person listed in the register of electors. This factor, as it related to the apparent disparity in the population size vis-à-vis the number of names on the list of electors, was seen by the Observer Mission as needing greater investigation, although it seemed that the tradition of ancestral voting was at the root of this seemingly apparent anomaly.

Further, in matters of campaign finance, for which no regulations exist, as well as the right of Kittians and Nevisians living abroad to claim to be domiciled in the country, and being qualified as voters and returning to vote on Polling Day, are considered by the Mission as areas that need to be addressed to give a greater measure of transparency to the electoral system.

In sum, the Mission is of the view that there is need for the system of registration, which is the crux of the matter of voter identification, to be tightened by instituting appropriate regulatory mechanisms. Further, the Code of Conduct agreed to by the political parties several years ago has fallen into abeyance and should be revisited and subscribed to by all concerned.

The Observer Mission wishes to praise the people of St Kitts and Nevis for keeping the elections free of major incidents, for participating so unreservedly in the democratic process and for the expression of support given to the Mission. It also wishes to commend the political parties and the media houses for their efforts in mounting a concerted voter education programme in light of the absence of same by the relevant authorities. The CARICOM Observer Mission is of the view that visual demonstrations of the process via the electronic media would have enhanced such an exercise.

Finally, the CARICOM Observer Mission wishes to thank the Secretary-General for the opportunity to serve the people of St Kitts and Nevis, His Excellency the Governor General for the courtesies extended to the Mission and for the warmth of his expression of support.

The Mission also thanks the Leaders and representatives of the political parties for insights on contentious issues affecting the electoral system, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for its assistance, the Chamber of Commerce and other Non-Governmental Organisations for responding to its request for dialogue, the Commissioner of Police, the Supervisor of Elections and the Church organisations for the invaluable contributions made to the successful conclusion of the work of the CARICOM Observer Mission to St Kitts and Nevis 2004.

CARICOM Electoral Observer Mission
Basseterre, ST KITTS AND NEVIS
26 October 2004