



PRELIMINARY STATEMENT OF THE CARICOM ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION (CEOM) TO GENERAL ELECTIONS OF SURINAME 27 MAY 2005

The General Elections held on 25 May 2005 were monitored by the CARICOM Electoral Observer Mission at the invitation of the Government of the Republic of Suriname. The six-member Observer Team's principal functions were to monitor the preparations for the Elections, the campaign, the conduct of the poll and the counting of the ballots, as well as to assess the outcome of the Elections.

In discharging those functions, the CARICOM Electoral Observer Group met with the President of the Republic of Suriname, His Excellency Ronald Runaldo Venetiaan and held discussions with electoral officials, the Police and representatives of political parties and civil society, including youth groups and the business community. The CARICOM Team also met and exchanged notes with the Organisation of American States (OAS) Observer Group.

On Polling Day, the members of the Observer Mission were deployed in five Electoral Districts, namely Paramaribo, Wanica, Saramaca, Commewijne and Para. Members of the Mission were widely accepted and made to feel welcome at all Polling Stations, which were clearly numbered.

The Observer Team witnessed the distribution of electoral materials at the Main Polling Stations (District Commissioner's Offices); the setting up, opening and closing of selected Polling Stations; the voting process; and the counting of the ballots. The Team therefore had the opportunity to make a reasonable assessment of the electoral process.

The Mission's preliminary assessment concludes that an adequate number of polling stations were established to ensure voters' access to the Poll, and in addition, conditions were conducive for the expression of voters. The voters turned out in large numbers despite the inclement weather during the day. Voters queued in an orderly manner, exercised patience and were able to cast their ballots without intimidation.

The General Elections were conducted in a peaceful and fair manner. The voting process ran smoothly and well, without any semblance of violence, in spite of reports of minor incidents relating to the burning of political billboards prior to Polling Day.

The two issues which hung over the electoral process prior to the Poll, namely the alleged additional 29,000 voters on the Voters' List, and the alleged 8,000 names missing from the List, were not featured on Polling Day. However, as a result of these issues being raised prior to

Polling Day, they served as slight blemishes to an otherwise transparent electoral process, and pointed to the need for improving the database of the civil and electoral registries.

Polling Day was characterised by calm, good humor and friendliness between supporters and agents of opposing parties outside Polling Stations. The electoral officials and the people of Suriname are therefore highly commended for their responsible behaviour and the maturity displayed, which undoubtedly reflected their confidence in the electoral process and commitment to democratic principles.

The chairperson and other officials in the Polling Stations carried out their duties in a competent and professional manner, and with impartiality. In general, stipulated procedures were consistently and uniformly followed, with the expected minor variations and deviations. Transparency of the voting process was ensured, an adequate number of poll booths were provided and secrecy of the ballot was respected, except in a few cases where it was observed that some over zealous officers took the ballot paper from voters, and opened and folded them in the prescribed manner.

The CARICOM Team observed that the counting of ballots at selected Polling Stations went slowly. It was difficult to verify or see the mark on the ballot against the name of the candidate for whom the voter cast his or her ballot, as announced by the chairperson. It is the view of the Team that by making provision for agents to sit in the Polling Stations to closely monitor the counting process and the provision of adequate lighting facilities, these measures could enhance the process and ensure greater transparency. Improvements to facilitate proper auditing of ballots issued and ballots cast could also lend greater integrity to the counting process.

These findings and recommendations, along with other suggestions for improving the electoral system, including the need for strengthening voter education and the rationalisation of all the government agencies directly responsible for the Elections, will be submitted in the Observer Mission's report to the CARICOM Secretary-General, His Excellency Edwin Carrington.

The CARICOM Electoral Observer Mission takes this opportunity to express thanks to the Government and people of Suriname for the courtesies extended to the Mission. The Observer Mission also expresses thanks and appreciation for the cooperation received from officials in the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, particularly Ms Valerie Lalji who provided tremendous logistical support to the Mission. Sincere gratitude is extended, too, to the Independent Elections Bureau, the Police, representatives of political parties, civil society, the business community, the Media and the OAS Group.

Finally, the CARICOM Observer Mission expresses sincere thanks to the District Commissioners, Polling Station Chairpersons and other Polling Officials whose cooperation contributed significantly to the success of the Mission.

CARICOM Electoral Observer Mission
Paramaribo
SURINAME
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