



CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (CARICOM) ELECTORAL OBSERVER MISSION TO THE GENERAL ELECTIONS IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO ON 10 DECEMBER 2001

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

The CARICOM Electoral Observer Mission was mounted, at the invitation of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, to monitor the conduct of the General Elections on 10 December, 2001.

Before observing the conduct of the Elections, the Mission held consultations with the Government Officials, Officials of the Elections and Boundaries Commission, the Police, leaders and representatives of political parties, and the Media. The Mission also attended political meetings and rallies, and monitored the campaign of the political parties through the Media. These activities allowed the Mission to gain a better understanding of the preparations for the Elections and an appreciation of the major issues relating to the conduct of the Elections.

On the Day of the Elections, the fourteen-member Mission was deployed in all 36 Electoral Districts (Constituencies) of the twin-island Republic. Members of the Mission observed the opening of the Poll at selected Polling Stations, and the voting process in a large percentage of the 1682 Polling Stations established for the Elections. The Observer Mission also witnessed the counting of the Ballots at various Polling Stations, and the transport of ballot boxes to the Returning Officers.

The Mission's assessment of the conduct of the Poll is that voters were able to cast their ballots, without intimidation or harassment, and that the voting process was conducted in an orderly, free and peaceful manner. The Mission was especially impressed by the efficiency and impartiality in which the voting process was managed. The process was transparent and the secrecy of the ballot was respected.

The common area of concern was in relation to the Voters List. The Mission is of the view that the large number of omissions from the Voters List may have created frustration for some voters on Polling Day. In cases reported to the Mission by Electoral Officials, for instance, some members of families residing at the same address were able to cast their ballot, while others were unable to vote on account of the fact that their names were removed from the List.

Although the Mission could not ascertain the full magnitude of voter frustration due to the omission of names from the List, it is felt that this problem is a serious cause for concern in terms of the credibility and fairness of the electoral process. Some of the omissions may be attributable to human error, lack of response by persons to notices issued by the Elections and

Boundaries Commission, and inadequate time to prepare for the Elections. It is therefore the recommendation of the Mission that a further review of the Voters List would certainly help to build greater confidence in the electoral process. This recommendation, however, is not intended to obscure the positive and praiseworthy aspects of the process.

A full report on the Mission's findings and recommendations will be submitted to the CARICOM Secretary-General.

The Mission commends the people of Trinidad and Tobago for the peaceful manner in which the Elections were conducted. The turnout reflects a strong commitment to the democratic process, for which the Electorate deserves high praise.

The Observer Mission will like to thank His Excellency, The President for the courtesies extended to the Mission. The Mission will also like to extend its appreciation for the cooperation obtained from Government Officials, particularly Officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Chief Election Officer and his Staff, the Electoral and Boundaries Commission, the Police, leaders and representatives of political parties, and the Media.