



CARICOM ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION TO THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS ON 7 SEPTEMBER 2015

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

The twelve (12) member CARICOM Election Observation Mission which at the invitation of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago monitored the September 7, 2015 Parliamentary Elections, visited (353) three hundred and fifty-three polling stations across (22) twenty-two of the forty-one (41) established electoral districts. The Mission monitored the day's activities by observing the Opening of the Poll, the Voting process, the Closing of the Poll and Counting of ballots.

Indications are that polling stations opened on time as voting started promptly at 6:00 a.m. in all the stations in which the opening was observed. All stations were fully staffed and most had at least two (2) agents present representing the two (2) major political parties. The polling stations for the most part were conveniently located and easily accessible to the electorate including the disabled. The Mission found that all of the supplies and materials needed were present in the required quantities.

Adequate security was in place at all locations with the Officers displaying a very professional approach which contributed to the level of calm which accompanied the day's activities. The turn out of voters was steady throughout the day and the poll workers remained resolute and steadily carried out the required procedures ensuring that all electors who turned out were able to register their vote. The Mission noted the heavy down pour of rains in the afternoon which curtailed free movement in some areas and the bold move by the EBC to extend polling in Trinidad only by one (1) hour.

The Mission also notes that one of the major concerns on the day was the alleged sending out of text messages advising electors how to vote. This it is felt contravened the regulations which prohibits campaigning on Election Day. The view of the Mission is that this is an issue which needs to be reviewed and addressed not only by Trinidad and Tobago but the Region in general. The advent and increasing use of social media, tweets text messaging and facebook posts etc. in politics, strictly speaking does not fit into the traditional definition of campaigning. Hence it is felt that each territory must seek to develop guidelines and regulations in relation to election campaigning and the use of social media.

Other issues raised by stakeholders including equal access to state media, monitoring of election related spending and greater participation of women are issues which are essential to improving governance and the electoral process in general. The Mission believes that while

urgent attention needs to be given to these matters, they did not in any way impact the way the polls were conducted on Election Day.

The Mission's assessment of the day's activities is that the voters were able to cast their ballots without intimidation or harassment and that the results of the Elections reflect the will of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Mission wishes to congratulate the staff of the Electoral Commission, the Poll Workers, the Political Parties and their Candidates, the Security Forces and the People of Trinidad and Tobago for the mature way in which the Elections were conducted with no reported incidents of violence, and the high level of discipline displayed throughout the process.

The Mission will prepare a full report for submission to the Secretary-General of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), H.E. Ambassador Irwin LaRocque which will include recommendations and suggestions for strengthening the electoral process in Trinidad and Tobago.

Again the CARICOM Election Observation Mission wishes to thank the Leaders of the Political Parties, Civil Society, the Media and the People of Trinidad and Tobago for their warm welcome and cooperation which contributed to the success of the Mission.

ORRETTE FISHER
CHIEF OF MISSION
CARICOM ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION
8 SEPTEMBER 2015