



## **STATEMENT ISSUED BY THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (CARICOM) ELECTORAL OBSERVER MISSION TO THE GENERAL ELECTIONS IN ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES ON 7 DECEMBER 2005**

At the invitation of the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the five-member CARICOM Electoral Observer Mission critically observed the General Elections held on Wednesday, 07 December 2005.

The principal tasks of the Observer Mission were to monitor the preparations for the Elections, and the comportment of electoral officials and political stakeholders; and observe the electoral process, including the conduct of the Poll and the counting of the ballots. The Mission was also mandated to assess the outcome of the Elections and its impact on the political environment.

In discharging its functions, the CARICOM Electoral Observer Mission met with His Excellency the Governor General and held discussions with Leaders and representatives of the political parties: The Unity Labour Party; The New Democratic Party; and the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Green Party. The Observer Mission also held extensive discussions with the Supervisor of Elections, Officials of the Ministry of National Security and the Commissioner of Police. Discussions were also held with representatives of the Media and of civil society, including the Youth Council, the Public Service Union and the National Monitoring and Consultative Mechanism (NMCM). The Mission also met and exchanged notes with the Organisation of American States (OAS) Observer Group, and attended rallies of political parties.

On Polling Day, the five members of the Observer Mission were deployed in the thirteen Constituencies on mainland St. Vincent. Members of the Mission were warmly accepted and made to feel welcome at Polling Stations. The Mission observed the opening and closing of the Polls, and the counting of ballots at selected Polling Stations.

Members of the Mission visited some 90% percent of the total number of Polling Stations on mainland St. Vincent and therefore had an opportunity to make a reasonable assessment of the electoral process.

The Mission's preliminary assessment is that the preparations for the conduct of the Elections were adequate, despite concerns raised about the Voters List in relation to the enumeration and transfer of voters. It is however felt the 15-day period for registration of voters, after the Writ of Election has been issued, should be reviewed. The Mission also felt that greater effort could have been made in the area of voter education, particularly in respect of the introduction of a new type of ballot paper.

The Mission is also of the view that a single independent body should manage the electoral process. This will help to strengthen the electoral process and build greater public confidence in the electoral system.

Notwithstanding these recommendations, it was felt the conditions existed for the free expression of the voters' will. The voters turned out in relatively good numbers in spite of the inclement weather during Polling Day. Voters queued in an orderly manner, exercised patience, and were able to cast their ballot without hindrance or intimidation.

The General Elections were conducted in a peaceful manner. The voting process ran smoothly, without any semblance of violence, despite reports of minor incidents prior to Polling Day.

The Polling Stations were managed competently and the electoral officials carried out their duties in a professional and impartial manner. In general, transparency of the voting process was ensured, the secrecy of the ballot was respected and stipulated procedures were consistently and uniformly followed, although there were minor variations in the administration of, and deviations from, required procedures.

The CARICOM Electoral Observer Mission is of the view that the results of the General Elections reflected the will of the people and their commitment to the democratic and electoral processes. Such commitment would no doubt be enhanced by a better voter education programme and more effective administration of the electoral process.

The Observer Mission therefore wishes to commend the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines for their high level of maturity in ensuring that the General Elections were conducted peacefully and in an environment conducive to the free expression of the will of voters.

The findings and recommendations of the Mission, including suggestions for improving the electoral system and enhancing the integrity of the electoral process, will be submitted in the Mission's report to the CARICOM Secretary-General.

The CARICOM Electoral Observer Mission wishes to take this opportunity to express thanks to the Government and people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines for the courtesies extended to the Mission.

The Observer Mission also expresses thanks and appreciation for the cooperation received from the Office of the Supervisor of Elections, the Ministry of National Security and the Police. Sincere gratitude is extended, too, to the leaders and representatives of political parties, civil society, the Media and the OAS Observer Group.

Finally, the CARICOM Electoral Observer Mission expresses thanks to the Returning Officers, Presiding Officers, Poll Clerks and last, but not least, the drivers, whose cooperation contributed significantly to the success of the Mission.

CARICOM Electoral Observer Mission  
Kingstown  
St. Vincent and the Grenadines  
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