

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The main conclusions we have reached are that:

- the conditions existed for a free expression of the will of the voters of Lesotho. Where we observed the process, the atmosphere was peaceful, the voters were able to cast their votes freely and the secrecy of the ballot was assured;
- despite some administrative and logistic problems, the poll was conducted in a manner that provided the people of Lesotho with the opportunity to vote freely for the candidates of their choice. We do not consider that the administrative and logistic problems experienced detracted from the overall organisation of the election so as to affect the true expression of the will of the people;
- the results of the election reflect the wishes of the people;
- the Basotho people, as a whole, appear to be willing to make every effort to ensure that there is no repetition of the violence which followed the 1998 general election; and
- there was, in the lead up to the election, wide support for the mixed member proportional (MMP) system of representation.

Prior to election day:

- the voter registration process was credible and the voters' list provided a legitimate and broadly acceptable basis for the conduct of this election;
- the Independent Electoral Commission made every effort to involve the community and stakeholders in the preparations for the election: it took considerable care to deliver a programme of voter education to familiarise the people with the new MMP system;
- the political parties were able to organise effectively and campaign openly; and
- the lack of non-state electronic media outside the major towns impeded access by opposition parties to the electorate.

Election Day:

- voters turned out in large numbers and we were impressed by the high level of participation of Basotho women in both the conduct of the poll and in exercising their democratic rights;
- the venues for polling and the state of the infrastructure imposed on election officials constraints in the counting of votes and transmission of results and, in some cases, even in the opening of the poll;
- security measures at polling stations were good, the police performed their duties in relation to the public discreetly and provided an excellent service in the guarding of material prior to, during and after the poll; and
- party agents attended the poll in significant numbers and we accept their assurances that the integrity of the poll was not compromised or debased. Their dedication to duty before, during and after the poll was admirable.

Recommendations

The Group wished to make recommendations for consideration by the IEC in its preparations for and conduct of future elections.

We recommend that government resources should not be used unfairly in an electoral campaign by the incumbent party or parties.

In relation to voter registration and the voter list we suggest that –

- during voter registration, the supply of essential materials, such as cameras and the batteries for the camera flashes and UV-lamps, to the registration centres should in future enjoy high level attention;
- consideration be given to shortening the time between scheduled future elections and the close of voter registration.

In preparing for Polling Day we suggest that –

- the separate colours for the constituency and party ballot papers should be maintained;
- all election material should be provided in Sesotho and English including electoral forms, envelopes and, in particular, the Polling Station Procedures Manual;
- all requisite supplies for polling stations be delivered securely and on time;
- the Polling Station Procedures Manual should recommend more explicitly the methodology for the counting of votes;
- the IEC should ensure effective training for polling officials to facilitate speedy reconciliation of votes, the count and the completion of paperwork;
- the IEC take further steps to improve the conditions under which polling officials work. In this context it may be appropriate that donor assistance be solicited.

On Polling Day we recommend that –

- the list of advance voters who voted should be distributed to polling stations in order to minimise the risk of attempts at multiple voting;
- consideration should be given to providing both the constituency and party ballot paper to voters simultaneously in order to speed up the process of voting;
- in relation to the Count –
 - simplified terminology relating to spoiled ballot papers, rejected papers and informal ballot papers should be adopted;
 - the statutory requirements for the display of the ballot paper to ‘all interested parties in the polling station’ should be reviewed with the objective of speeding up this stage; and
 - constituencies should be free to communicate their results to the IEC Headquarters directly, instead of being required to report them to the Area Electoral Office for communication onwards.

When voting is extended to a second or subsequent day we believe that the IEC Headquarters should refrain from announcing the results of polls in other constituencies as such action could affect the decision of voters who are still to vote.