

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Invitation

At the invitation of the Independent Electoral Commission of The Gambia (IEC), the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Mr Kamallesh Sharma, constituted a Commonwealth Expert Team (CET)¹ for the presidential election in The Gambia on 24 November 2011. The CET was led by Professor Bolaji Akinyemi, former Foreign Affairs Minister of Nigeria, and comprised five persons. It was supported by a four-member staff team from the Commonwealth Secretariat (See Annex 1 for full Team list).

The Terms of Reference for the CET were as follows:

"The Team will conduct an analysis of the general conduct and framework for the elections, considering the preparations as well as the polling, counting and results and the overall electoral environment.

The Team is expected to meet with relevant national and international stakeholders, notably government bodies responsible for organising the elections, representatives of political parties, civil society and the diplomatic corps.

The Team is to act impartially and independently. It has no executive role; its function is not to supervise but to observe the process to the extent possible and to assess whether it has been conducted according to the standards for democratic elections to which The Gambia has committed itself, with reference to national election-related legislation and relevant regional, Commonwealth and other international commitments.

The Team is to submit its report to the Commonwealth Secretary-General."

Activities of the Group

The CET was present in The Gambia from 18 to 29 November. During four days of briefings, the Team met a number of stakeholders including the Chairman of the IEC, political party representatives, civil society groups, media, Commonwealth High Commissioners, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and international, regional and domestic observer groups.

The CET was deployed around the country on 22 November, reporting from all five regions and the capital city, Banjul. During the deployment phase at the regional

¹ The abbreviation CET is used interchangeably with the 'Team'

level, the Team met with election officials, security personnel, representatives of political parties, voters and other observers in order to build up a comprehensive picture of the electoral process.

On the basis of the Team's findings, the Chairperson issued an interim statement on 28 November 2011 (a copy can be found at Annex 2). The Team's Report was completed in Banjul and thereafter transmitted to the Commonwealth Secretary-General.