

Annex 1: Commonwealth Press Release and Biographies of the Team



COMMONWEALTH NEWS RELEASE

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA 11/56

17 November 2011

Commonwealth Team to observe The Gambia presidential elections

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UNITED KINGDOM
UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA
VANUATU
ZAMBIA

A Commonwealth Expert Team will observe the presidential elections due to take place on 24 November 2011 in The Gambia, Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamalesh Sharma announced today. The Team has been constituted at the invitation of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) of The Gambia and following a recent high-level political assessment mission to The Gambia led by Deputy Secretary-General Mmasckgoa Masire-Mwamba.

Announcing that the team of five experts, supported by a four-member staff team from the Commonwealth Secretariat, will be led by Professor Bolaji Akinyemi, former foreign minister of Nigeria, Mr Sharma said that the mandate of the team is to observe the preparations for the election; the polling, counting and results process; and the electoral environment as a whole.

The Secretary-General added: 'The Commonwealth Secretariat works as a trusted partner with member states on strengthening democratic institutions and processes. A key way of doing this is by observing elections, when invited, as well as through longer term engagement on providing advice and technical assistance.'

The expert team will assess the overall conduct of the elections, and the environment in which they take place, and where appropriate will make recommendations for strengthening of the electoral process in future.

The team arrives in Banjul by 18 November 2011 and will remain in The Gambia until 29 November 2011.

The full composition of the Commonwealth Expert Team is as follows:

Professor Bolaji Akinyemi (Chair)
Former Foreign Minister
Nigeria

Ms Cynthia Barrow-Giles
Academic
St. Lucia

Mr Edward Alexander Canfor-Dumas
Conflict Management Consultant
United Kingdom

**Fiji was fully suspended from the Commonwealth in 2009.*

1/2

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Mr Christopher Cobb
President, Commonwealth Journalists Association
Canada

Madam Sa-adata Maida
Commissioner, Electoral Commission
Ghana

The Commonwealth Secretariat support staff team will be led by Ambassador Ayo Oke, Head of the Africa Section, Political Affairs Division.

The Commonwealth observed the 2001 and 2006 Presidential Elections in The Gambia. Commonwealth Teams were also present for the legislative elections in 2002 and 2007.

Note to Editors:

The Team's report will be submitted to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, who will in turn send it to the Government of The Gambia, the IEC, the political parties and eventually to all Commonwealth governments.

The Expert Team will act impartially and independently and shall conduct itself according to the standards expressed in the International Declaration of Principles for Election Observation to which the Commonwealth is a signatory.

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In London: Julius Mucunguzi, Communications Officer and Assistant Spokesperson for Africa on Tel: +44 (0)789 459 3517 or e-mail: j.mucunguzi@commonwealth.int

Biographies of CET Members

Professor A. Bolaji Akinyemi (Nigeria – Chairperson)

Professor Akinyemi has a doctorate degree from Oxford University. He is a Professor of political science having taught in several universities both in Nigeria and overseas. He has been a visiting Scholar/Fellow at Cambridge University, Geneva Graduate Institute for International Studies, University of California, Los Angeles, among several others. He has been the Director-General of the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs and a Nigerian Foreign Minister. He was a member of the Nigerian Presidential Electoral Reform Committee, Chairman of the (Nigerian) National Think Tank. He is the holder of a Commander of the Federal Republic (the third highest Nigerian National honour).

Ms Cynthia Barrow-Giles (St Lucia)

Ms Barrow-Giles is a lecturer in political science at the Cave Hill campus, University of West Indies, Barbados. She has served as Head of Department of Government, Sociology and Social work, 2004-2006 and Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences 1994-1996. Ms Barrow-Giles has authored, edited, and co-edited a number of books and articles including "General elections and voting in the English speaking Caribbean 1992-1995, published in 2006. She currently serves as a member of the St Lucia Constitution Reform Commission.

Mr Edward Alexander Canfor-Dumas (United Kingdom)

Edward took the lead role in founding the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Conflict Issues in 2006 and has developed extensive relationships with the peace-building and conflict management sector, Parliamentarians, government, business and the media.

Alongside his conflict work, Edward is a TV scriptwriter, whose award-winning credits include popular dramas *The Bill* and *Kavanagh QC*, and the worldwide hits *Pompeii: The Last Day* (nominated for two BAFTAs) and *Supervolcano*.

A graduate of New College, Oxford, Edward has also authored two best-selling books on Buddhism.

Mr Christopher Cobb (Canada)

Mr Cobb is a Canadian journalist and author Christopher Cobb is international vice-president of the Commonwealth Journalists Association and a board member of the Canadian Media and Democracy Group. Cobb, a staff writer for the Ottawa Citizen, has led many training workshops for journalists across the Commonwealth. He was previously a member of the Commonwealth Observer Group in Uganda.

Madam Sa-adata Maida (Ghana)

Sa-Adatu Maida currently works for Electoral Commission of Ghana as a Commissioner. She obtained her Masters degree in International Development at Brandies University, Massachusetts, USA. She is a development practitioner who has worked for West Africa Net work for Peace building (WANEP)–Ghana as a Project Consultant. She also worked for United Nations Development – (UNDP)as a Project Manager under the Disaster Recovery Project in Ghana.

Commonwealth Secretariat Staff Team

Ambassador Ayodele Oke, Head, Africa Section – Team Leader

Ms Yvonne Apea, Political Affairs Officer, Africa Section

Mr Marcus Beltran, Political Affairs Officer, Good Offices Section

Mrs Madonna Lynch, Administrative Assistant, Africa Section