

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

At the invitation of the Government of Uganda, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Mr Kamallesh Sharma, constituted an Observer Group for the 18 February, 2011 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections. In line with usual practice, the Secretary-General sent an Assessment Mission to Uganda to assess the prevailing situation as well as the pre-electoral environment, prior to his final decision on whether to constitute a Commonwealth Observer Group. The Assessment Mission was in the country from 10-15 December, 2010.

The Commonwealth Observer Group for the 18 February elections was led by Dame Billie Miller, who is a former Deputy Prime Minister of Barbados, and comprised thirteen eminent persons. The Observer Group was supported by a five-person staff team from the Commonwealth Secretariat. A full list of members is at Annex 1.

Terms of Reference

The Group is established by the Commonwealth Secretary-General at the request of the Government of Uganda. It is to observe relevant aspects of the organisation and conduct of the Presidential and Parliamentary Elections which are scheduled to take place on 18 February 2011, in accordance with the laws of Uganda.

The Group is to consider the various factors impinging on the credibility of the electoral process as a whole. It will determine in its own judgment whether the elections have been conducted according to the standards for democratic elections to which Uganda has committed itself, with reference to national election-related legislation and relevant regional, Commonwealth and other international commitments.

The Group is to act impartially and independently and shall conduct itself according to the standards expressed in the International Declaration of Principles to which the Commonwealth is a signatory. It has no executive role; its function is not to supervise but to observe the process as a whole and to form a judgment accordingly. In its Final Report, the Group is also free to propose to the authorities concerned recommendations for change on institutional, procedural and other matters as would assist the holding of future elections.

The Group is to submit its report to the Commonwealth Secretary-General who will forward it to the Government of Uganda, the Electoral Commission, political and civil society organizations and thereafter to all Commonwealth Governments.

Activities

The Observer Group was present in Uganda from 10 February, 2011. During four days of briefings, the Group met with the Electoral Commission, some Presidential candidates, political party representatives, the Inspector-General of Police, Human Rights Commission, civil society groups including human rights, monitoring and women's groups, youth representatives, news media, Commonwealth High Commissions, and national, regional and international observer missions.

An Arrival Statement was issued on 14 February, 2011 (see Annex 2). The Observer Group was deployed from 16-20 February. Two teams covered Kampala and its environs and others travelled to Arua, Gulu, Jinja, Kabale, Masindi, Mbale and Mbarara. Teams liaised with police, local election officials, civil society groups and party officials. Teams also met and co-ordinated with other observers, national regional and international, in their respective areas to build up a comprehensive picture of the conduct of the process.

On the basis of the Group's initial findings and observations, the Chairperson issued an Interim Statement on 20 February (Annex 3). The Group's Report was completed in Kampala prior to departure and transmitted to the Commonwealth Secretary-General on 24 February, 2011.