

## Chapter 3

### THE CAMPAIGN

The Official Gazette of Monday 21 February 2011 set out the Presidential Election Timetable. The official campaign period began a day after nomination day, and ran from 28 April 2011 to 15 May 2011.

The team welcomed the Code of Conduct agreed by the political parties and the presidential candidates. This code aimed at, *inter alia*, ensuring the integrity of the electoral process and maintaining a peaceful atmosphere during the election campaign and on polling day. It also detailed acceptable standards of behaviour related to electioneering during the campaign period.

The candidates adopted different campaign strategies. The candidate of Parti Lepep was the only one that held campaign rallies. The campaign among other candidates was conducted largely through door-to-door canvassing, political broadcasts provided for through the public broadcaster, in the private print media and on billboards. No candidate reported any impediments to their activities. The campaign was largely peaceful. We received a number of reports, however, that several billboards of some candidates had been defaced or destroyed, while others had to be removed after they were erected illegally. The Team noted various issues that were highlighted by almost all stakeholders relating to the perceived imbalance in the media coverage of the various candidates before the official campaign commenced, which allegedly continued to a lesser degree once the official campaign began.

The Team was able to witness the final campaign rally of Parti Lepep on 15 May which appeared to be well organized. Campaign materials on display included t-shirts, caps, flyers, clappers, large bill boards, refreshment, live music, party flags. The public broadcaster carried the event live on radio and television. The party supporters, the majority of whom appeared to be women and young people were orderly.

The reasons provided for by the opposition parties opting out of public rallies included cost factors, distorted public media coverage, perceived fear of intimidation and victimisation of opposition supporters, and their inability to secure their preferred venue on Mahé for the final day of campaigning.

The issues that dominated the campaign, included social housing, water pollution, employment, pensions, the state of the economy, the role of foreign direct investment, alleged selling of Seychellois passports, access to land, the acquisition of land by foreign investment, levels of foreign workers, influence

of money and inducement of voters. A more thorough discussion on the vote buying is provided Chapters Two and Four.

## **The Media**

Seychelles has a limited but growing media industry. The dominant media outlet is the publicly-owned Seychelles Broadcasting Corporation, which runs the only television and radio station. In addition, there are two daily newspapers and three party political weeklies.

A new Seychelles Broadcasting Act was passed in March 2011, and aimed to transform the SBC to operate independently of the influence of the State and other bodies, persons or political parties. We noted that despite this new legislation, there is widely-held view that the SBC media coverage is still overwhelming one-sided and dominated by the government with limited opportunities for opposition parties to access and air their views outside the official campaign period. We believe that there is a need for further reform of the SBC to give effect to its new role as a public service broadcaster, with equitable access to alternative political viewpoints outside the limited campaign period.

The cost of operating licenses for radio and television stations remains prohibitively high, at approximately \$80,000 per year. This high license fee has prevented independent broadcaster operators from emerging. An enabling democratic environment should be encouraged by substantially reducing the prohibitive cost of establishing and operating private radio and television stations. Discussions with government officials revealed a willingness to reduce the cost of licensing.

The Seychelles Media Commission was created by an Act of Parliament in December 2010, but only became operational in February 2011. The Commission consists of a Chairperson who is also the Chief Executive Officer and seven members, all of whom are appointed by the President. Five members are candidates proposed by the Judiciary, the National Assembly, the Department of Information, the Liaison Unit for Non-Governmental Organisations and the Seychelles Media Association. Two other members of good standing are appointed directly by the President.

Its stated purpose is to preserve the freedom of the media and maintain a high standard of journalism in Seychelles. It provides an independent arbitration mechanism between media organisations and between the public and the media. Concerns were expressed about the method of appointment and composition of the Board, indicating a high level of scepticism as to its neutrality. The Team noted, however, that the Commission had only just begun its work, and we hope that it will carry out its mandate effectively and thereby gain the trust and confidence of the media and general public.

## **Gender**

Seychelles is progressive in its gender issues, and has a high level of participation by women in active politics. We noted, however, that none of the presidential candidates, or running mates was female. Furthermore, only nine out of thirty-three Members of the current Parliament are women.

Seychelles has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and Article 4, in particular, calls for equal representation of women in public and political life. The Team recommends the implementation of CEDAW in domestic law, and the promotion of affirmative action and proportional representation in the holding of public office. It also recommends that gender issues be integrated and mainstreamed in constitutional and electoral reforms to reaffirm the principles of non-discrimination, equality, affirmative action, women's right to freedom, democratic processes and security.

## **Domestic Election Observation**

The Team noted that the Constitution and Elections Act are silent about the role and participation of the civil society in democratic processes.

Discussions were held with all stakeholders regarding the role of civil society in the electoral process. The Liaison Unit for Non-Governmental Organisations (LUNGOS), views itself as a national platform for NGOs and civil society. Its membership spans a wide spectrum of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), including professional bodies, human rights groups, faith-based organisations, media and gender-related networks. LUNGOS receives funds from Government to run some of its operations.

In 2006, the Centre for Rights and Development (CEFRAD), an NGO, applied for accreditation as a domestic election observer. It was reportedly denied accreditation on the basis of political affiliations. LUNGOS formally applied for accreditation as domestic electoral observers on 4 January 2011. The Electoral Commissioner acknowledged the essential role of Domestic Electoral Observers in the electoral process in promoting domestic electoral integrity, transparency and national ownership. He stated, however, that the Electoral Advisory Board had decided that LUNGOS as a liaison entity "is not adequately constituted to run an observer mission as its independence would be compromised".

The Electoral Advisory Board recommended that immediately after the Presidential election, LUNGOS incorporates an NGO with the specific objective of observing elections and conducting civic education programmes.

In view of the critical role that domestic observation plays in the democratic process, we urge the Electoral Commissioner and LUNGOS to work together to agree on the modalities and institutional framework that would facilitate domestic electoral observation.

The Team believes the Commonwealth is uniquely placed to create a platform for exchanging experiences and best practice on CSO engagement in democratic processes, including domestic electoral observation and is encouraged to explore how this can best be done.