

## **ANNEX 2: Preliminary Statement**



**Commonwealth Expert Team  
Seychelles Presidential Election  
19 - 21 May 2011**

### **PRELIMINARY STATEMENT**

**Dr. the Hon. Julian R Hunte SLC, OBE  
Chairperson of the Commonwealth Expert Team**

Following an invitation from the Electoral Commissioner to send observers to Seychelles for the 2011 Presidential Election, the Commonwealth Secretary-General constituted a Commonwealth Expert Team comprising five experts. The Team was supported by three officials from the Commonwealth Secretariat. I am honoured to have been asked to Chair the Team, which has been present in the country since 14 May 2011.

During this period we have met with the Electoral Commissioner, members of the Elections Advisory Board, political parties and presidential candidates, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Liaison Unit for Non-Government Organisations (LUNGOS), Commonwealth High Commissioners, the Media Commission, the Seychelles Broadcasting Corporation and private media, religious leaders, other observer teams and the Seychellois public, and discussed a number of issues relevant to the overall electoral process. In addition to meeting different stakeholders and interested parties, the Team also studied documentation from various sources.

Over the three days of voting, members of the Team reported from all 25 Electoral Areas where we observed the voting, counting and tabulation processes. We also met with electoral officials, other international observers and candidate polling agents other stakeholders in order to compile a more comprehensive picture of the conduct of the process.

#### **Management of the Electoral Process**

The Presidential Election was conducted in a peaceful atmosphere. During the campaign, candidates appeared to enjoy general freedom of movement and assembly. On voting days, universal suffrage was provided for and voters turned out in very large numbers across the country.

The Office of the Electoral Commissioner was well prepared for the elections and exhibited a high standard of organisation. Electoral officials appeared to have worked professionally and diligently in their preparation for polling days, and in the management of the voting and counting processes. Candidate representatives were present at polling stations.

The Voter Register appeared to be largely accurate and requisite checks were in place to ensure the requirement for voters to produce appropriate identification documents was observed. Based on our observation, the count and tabulation processes in polling stations were transparent and conducted fairly, though with a few inconsistencies in the application of relevant procedures.

### **Election Campaign and Political Participation**

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, party 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 noted that one prospective independent candidate, Mr Viral Dhanjee, faced legal and administrative challenges, which resulted in his non-participation as a candidate, which is of particular concern. This case is a matter before the Court of Appeal and the Team is therefore not in a position to comment substantively on it.

### **Conclusion**

As with most elections the Commonwealth has observed, there were positive developments in the electoral process, as well as areas of concern. We believe that the 2011 Presidential Election was well organised and peaceful. The technical aspects conducted by the Office of the Electoral Commissioner were efficient, transparent and credible. We conclude that the electoral process was credible and the outcome broadly reflects the wishes of the majority of Seychellois voters. The Team commends the people of Seychelles for their active involvement, and for their belief and participation in the electoral process.

While some fundamental elements of a democratic environment were met, others were not. As Seychelles strives to deepen and consolidate its democratic culture and practice, it needs to address several key issues. These include the establishment of an independent Electoral Commission; a thorough review of the Elections Act and other relevant legislation and procedures, so as to address key gaps and ambiguities in the legal framework related to elections; further reform of the Seychelles Broadcasting Corporation to give full and proper effect to its new role as a public service broadcaster, with equitable access to alternative political viewpoints outside the limited campaign period; and, finally, reducing substantially the current prohibitive cost of establishing and operating private radio and television stations.

This statement presents our preliminary views and findings. We are in the process of completing our Final Report. This will contain our final conclusions, as well as our detailed recommendations for suggested action by the relevant Seychellois authorities to enhance the democratic institutions, practice and culture that govern and shape the electoral process, where required.

We will on our departure from Seychelles on 26 May submit our Report to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, who will then transmit it to the candidates and other stakeholders. The Report will subsequently be released to all Commonwealth Governments and to the public on the Commonwealth Secretariat website in the coming weeks.

We are grateful to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Kamallesh Sharma, for inviting us to form this Commonwealth Expert Team, and thereby allowing us to make a contribution to the ongoing consolidation of democracy in Seychelles.

We wish to express our sincere thanks and appreciation to all stakeholders in Seychelles that have shared their views and insights with us. This enabled us to develop an understanding of the background to the election, and the electoral process itself. We express our particular appreciation to the Electoral Commissioner, Hendrick Gappy, and his staff for their excellent co-operation and assistance that facilitated our work greatly.

Above all, we express our appreciation to the people of Seychelles whose warmth and friendliness made us feel welcome. We hope that our presence and work will be of benefit to them.