

Conclusions

The formation of a Joint Commonwealth/La Francophonie Observer Group for these elections constituted an important step in the development of co-operation between the two organisations and demonstrates the common commitment of our member nations to promoting the principles of democracy.

We came to Seychelles at the invitation of the Government and with the support of all the political parties and other representative community groups. We wish to record our thanks to all the organisations and individuals who assisted us in our task and who generously gave us the benefit of their experience and knowledge.

We especially wish to thank the Electoral Commissioner and his staff whose co-operation and assistance was critical for the fulfilment of our mandate.

The preparations for the Presidential and National Assembly elections were thorough and professional. Voter education had been comprehensive. On the polling days it was evident that with few exceptions voters were aware of the voting procedures; and where there was a need to do so, electoral officials were able to provide clear and objective guidance.

There are, nevertheless, a number of procedural matters which the Group considers the Electoral Commissioner may wish to examine and include in his Report to the National Assembly and the President as provided for in the Constitution. We believe for instance that there is need to introduce measures which would speed up the voting process, especially in the larger electoral areas. Such measures might include changes in the numbers and the siting of polling stations. The Group also feels that the Electoral Commissioner might give consideration to recommending the introduction of a system of postal balloting which would assist persons within the Seychelles archipelago who are not present in their registered district on polling day. We further suggest that the Electoral Commissioner may wish to reflect on ways to ensure that the electoral districts have roughly equal populations. He may wish to consider how the absence of any expenditure limits for either parties or individual candidates affects the electoral process.

The Group wishes to stress the importance of continued efforts to strengthen democratic institutions and the rule of law in Seychelles. In this regard, the Group acknowledges the development of multi-party democracy over the past five years. At the same time, it believes it is now time for the various players, be they political, judicial, or other parties, to consider within the constitutional framework, the further improvement of the effective separation of state and party political functions.

We note the changes to the Constitution made in 1996 which had the effect of increasing the number of members of the National Assembly and the increased electoral areas introduced in a modification of the Elections Act. The constitutional amendment further changed the threshold for proportional representation from 8 to 10 per cent. This has been further analysed in the Report.

A party in government inevitably enjoys an advantage of incumbency. On this occasion, the Group has seen fit to draw attention to one aspect of concern, namely, the payment of social security benefits through accelerated means-testing immediately prior to the polls. We invite the Government to reflect on the timing of such a practice.

Finally, we conclude that the 1998 Presidential and National Assembly elections in Seychelles marked another important step in the development of multi-party democracy in this country. On the day, we have no reason to doubt that the voters of Seychelles were able to exercise their franchise in such a way that the end result accurately reflected the will of the people.