

Introduction

Invitation

Following receipt of a request from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Guyana, the Hon Clement Rohee, on 10 October 2000 inviting the Commonwealth Secretary-General to constitute a Commonwealth Observer Group for the 2001 General and Regional Elections, the Secretary-General decided – in line with established practice – to send an Assessment Mission to Guyana,



OBSERVERS DEPLOY . . .

Commonwealth Observers Phil Whelan and Leela Dookun Luchoomun prepare for their flight to the interior. Members of the Group were deployed in seven of the ten electoral districts and on polling day saw voting at 205 of the 1,894 polling stations . . .

comprising three Commonwealth Secretariat officials. The mandate of the Mission, which was in Guyana from Thursday, 16 to Thursday, 23 November 2000, was to establish whether there was broad support for the presence of Commonwealth Observers, prior to, during and immediately after the elections, in particular from the main political parties. On the basis of meetings with political parties and civil society groupings the Assessment Mission concluded that there was broad support for the presence of a Commonwealth Observer Group for Guyana's elections. A Commonwealth Observer Group of 11 Observers, supported by seven staff from the Commonwealth Secretariat, was subsequently constituted by the Secretary-General in accordance with the Commonwealth Guidelines for the Establishment of Observer Groups. The composition of the Group, which was led by Mr Jeremia Tabai, is set out in *Annex I*.

Terms of Reference

The terms of reference for the Observer Group were incorporated in the Secretary-General's letter inviting each of us to participate in this mission. They were as follows:

The Group is established by the Commonwealth Secretary-General at the request of the Government of Guyana. It is to observe relevant aspects of the organisation and conduct of the General Election in accordance with the laws

of Guyana. It is to consider the various factors impinging on the credibility of the electoral process as a whole and to determine in its own judgement whether the conditions exist for a free expression of will by the electors and if the results of the elections reflect the wishes of the people.

The Group is to act impartially and independently. It has no executive role; its function is not to supervise but to observe the process as a whole and to form a judgement accordingly. It would also be free to propose to the authorities concerned such action on institutional, procedural and other matters as would assist the holding of such elections.

The Group is to submit its report to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, who will forward it to the Government of Guyana, the Guyana Elections Commission, the leadership of the political parties taking part in the elections and thereafter to all Commonwealth governments.

Activities of the Group

An Advance Group, comprising an Observer and one member of the Secretariat staff, arrived in Georgetown on 26 February to assess conditions in

the run-up to the elections. They met with political parties and election officials and travelled extensively throughout Guyana to speak to officials and aspirant electors. The rest of the Group assembled in Georgetown, Guyana on 11 March 2001 and was briefed by the leader of the Secretariat team, Ms Judith Pestaina, other Secretariat staff members and the Advance Group. The following day, Monday, 12 March, an Arrival Statement was issued at a press conference (see *Annex II*). During Monday, part of the Group observed the Disciplined Forces Poll in the Georgetown area. We all attended a briefing with the Chairperson of the Guyana Elections Commission, Major-General (Rtd) Joseph Singh.

On 13 and 14 March we held a series of meetings in Georgetown with representatives of the main political parties contesting the elections, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), representatives of the Amerindian community, media organisations, women's groups, Commonwealth High Commissioners accredited to Guyana and other international observers. We also met with the Commissioner of Police and his Deputies at the Police Headquarters in Georgetown. Some members of the Group had a further meeting with an Elections Commission official on Thursday, 15 March. Our schedule of engagements is at *Annex III*.

From 15 to 20 March Observers and Secretariat team members were deployed in Regions 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9 and 10 to assess first hand the state of electoral preparedness throughout the country. (Details of our deployment are given at *Annex IV*.) During this time our Chairperson travelled widely in Georgetown and its environs. In addition, on 16 March our Chairperson undertook visits to a number of regions and met with election officials and electors.



... AND GET TO KNOW THEIR AREA . . . the Observers spent the four days before election day familiarising themselves with their area and meeting community leaders, as here: Lady Carol Kidu meets the captain of the Red Hill Amerindian community . . .



. . . Meanwhile, Chairperson Jeremia Tabai (*on the left*) visited a number of the electoral districts: here he learns about polling day arrangements from a Returning Officer

On polling day we observed voting at 205 polling stations across the country. We observed the count at 12 stations. On our return to Georgetown a number of us were able to observe the tallying process at the Elections Commission Headquarters.

During our visits to polling stations we spoke to election officials, party representatives, international and local observers, security personnel and voters themselves. During our deployment we were assisted by observation notes and check lists (see examples at *Annex V*). On the basis of our reports during deployment, our Chairperson issued an Interim Statement at 7.30 p.m. on 20 March 2001. A copy of this statement appears at *Annex VI*.

Our Group reassembled in Georgetown on 20 March for a debriefing and to finalise our Report. We departed from Guyana on 24 March 2001 (see *Departure Statement at Annex VII*).