

Conclusions and Recommendations

In our Departure Statement we highlighted the need for Guyana to transcend its still largely ethnic politics and find a way to build inclusiveness and unity. We believe that these are the pre-eminent challenges before the people and institutions of this country. We hope that the Commonwealth and all other friends of Guyana will stand ready to help in that effort, but recognise that the major responsibility lies with the people themselves.

So far as these elections are concerned, our main conclusions are as follows:

- the people of Guyana embraced these elections with enthusiasm and commitment to the democratic process;
- the Elections Commission should be congratulated for its efforts to ensure that the elections were held on the appointed day;
- the people were able to express their will, but the shortcomings in the election arrangements detracted from otherwise praiseworthy arrangements: the errors in the Voters' List reduced public confidence in the voting process, while the long delay in producing the results resulted in public concern and rising tension.

On polling day:

- in the places where we observed, there was no evidence of intimidation or abuse of the electoral process; the parties campaigned openly; the voters cast their votes freely; the secrecy of the ballot was assured;
- the polling was properly and impartially carried out in all regions and the count was thorough and transparent;
- party agents showed confidence in the electoral process and co-operated with polling staff in ensuring that voting procedures were efficiently carried out;
- the process was generally peaceful and security arrangements for polling and counting were good;
- in most instances, polling materials were adequate, polling staff were well trained and helpful;
- we noted with approval that women had an important role in the electoral process, although we regret that the electoral system is not as positive from a gender point of view as at first appears.

We also noted:

- that Observers were welcomed by the people, political parties, the Commission, and polling staff, who treated them with courtesy and facilitated their observation of all aspects of the electoral process;
- the decision to integrate the results of the Disciplined Forces Poll with those of the rest of the electorate – a measure recommended by the 1997 Commonwealth Observer Group – was a positive development and ensured that the secrecy of the Disciplined Forces Poll was maintained.

Recommendations

In our Interim Statement we proposed that before the next elections the Elections Commission should review all aspects of its election management arrangements, ensuring that the lessons of 1997 and 2001 are learnt and that the appropriate action is taken. In addition, we recommend that:

- in view of the errors in the Voters' List, a complete audit of the Elections Commission computer systems be undertaken and a new, continuous system of voter registration be introduced;
- the Elections Commission should make more efficient arrangements for the speedy and accurate transmission of the results from the polling stations after the count, and more effective computer processing by the Elections Commission, so that the figures can be released to the public as early and with as little confusion as possible;
- in general, better mechanisms be put in place within the Elections Commission for more effective communication of its decisions to the public and its own staff;
- the Guyana Elections Commission be constituted in a manner which ensures its independence and neutrality;
- Elections Commission staff be made permanent so that the Commission no longer relies on secondees or other staff from state bodies, the process of the recruitment of polling station staff be reviewed with a view to further enhancement of standards in future elections, there also be clear criteria for recruitment, and that there should be a permanent training programme;
- the National Identification Card should be issued by a public authority other than the Elections Commission and its use in the electoral process should be reviewed;
- the Chairman of the Elections Commission or the Chief Elections Officer should have the power to extend polling station hours, within a reasonable limit and with adequate notice;
- consideration should be given to ways in which the electoral process in District Four can be more effectively managed;
- all candidates and parties should be required to sign up to an enforceable Code of Conduct regarding behaviour during the campaign and election period as a prerequisite of nomination;
- media organisations should agree to a self-regulatory Code of Conduct with an independent body to deal with complaints, a regulatory framework should be developed for broadcasting standards, and state-owned media should be more independent and serve the interests of the whole population rather than just the government of the day;
- mechanisms be introduced to ensure that campaign financing arrangements are transparent;
- a regular, collective forum be created for all the parties, at national and regional level, and a mechanism be created for collective consultation between the political parties and the Elections Commission;
- the Voter Education programme be evaluated to see how it can be improved; for future elections consideration might be given to the

inclusion of information about the objectives and functions of international election observers.

So far as the mechanics of the polling and counting process are concerned:

- consideration should be given to the possible use of mobile polling stations in remote areas;
- photographs of the President and Prime Minister and material carrying a party symbol should not be displayed during voting in buildings used for polling;
- less bureaucratic procedures should be adopted after the completion of the count to make it more user-friendly;
- consideration should be given to further ways of assisting disabled voters in exercising their franchise;
- the ballot box seal should be redesigned so that when the ballot boxes are opened the number is not cut through;
- the Disciplined Forces envelopes should be counted when the ballot boxes are opened, to ensure that no extra envelopes are inserted after the close of the poll; the envelopes should also be pre-printed.