

# Introduction

The presence of a Commonwealth Observer Group at the general election in St Kitts and Nevis on 3 July 1995, arose from a request of 20 February 1995 from the Government of St Kitts and Nevis to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Chief Emeka Anyaoku, to send a Commonwealth observer mission to observe the national election due before 15 November 1995.

In response to the request, and in line with established practice, the Secretary-General sent a Commonwealth Secretariat Planning Mission to St Kitts and Nevis to meet with representatives of political parties and other interested groups.

The Mission, which visited St Kitts and Nevis from 20-25 March 1995, reported that a Commonwealth Observer Group would be welcomed by all political parties contesting the election.

The Commonwealth Observer Group to St Kitts and Nevis was the fifteenth such electoral mission organised by the Commonwealth since the October 1989 meeting of Commonwealth Heads of Government. At that meeting, Heads of Government had agreed that member states could benefit from an election observer facility, as a means of strengthening democratic processes and institutions. At their 1991 meeting, Heads of Government issued the Harare Commonwealth Declaration which enshrined as the fundamental values of the Commonwealth democracy, democratic processes and institutions which reflect national circumstances, fundamental human rights, the rule of law and just and honest government. This collective commitment was reaffirmed by Heads of Government at their Cyprus meeting in 1993.

## The Observer Group and its Terms of Reference

It was against this background that the Secretary-General invited our Group of eight Observers, supported by five members of staff from the Commonwealth Secretariat, to observe the national election of 3 July 1995 on behalf of the Commonwealth. The composition of the Group is set out at *Annex I*.

The Terms of Reference of the Group as set out by the Secretary-General in his letter to us were:

The Group is established by the Commonwealth Secretary-General at the request of the Government of St Kitts and Nevis and supported by the political parties. It is to observe relevant aspects of the organisation and conduct of the election in accordance with the law of St Kitts and Nevis. It is to consider the various factors impinging on the credibility of the electoral process as a whole and to determine in its own judgment whether the conditions exist for a free expression of will by the electors and if the result of the election reflects 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 judgment 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 the election.

The Group will submit its report to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, who will forward it to the Government of St Kitts and Nevis, to the leadership of the political parties taking part in the election and thereafter to Commonwealth governments.

Within the above Terms of Reference, the Group was asked to form an independent judgment which would in no way represent either the views of any government or of the office of the Secretary-General.

The Secretary-General issued a press statement in London on 22 June 1995 announcing our mission (*Annex II*).

### Method of Work

We assembled in Antigua on 26 June 1995 for an initial briefing by Max Gaylard, the head of the Secretariat support team. This was followed by a telephone conference with the Secretary-General while he was in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

On arrival in Basseterre on 27 June 1995, the Chairman of our Group issued a statement at the airport (*Annex III*). Over the following four days, we had extensive discussions with the Electoral Commission and the Supervisor of Elections, and met with the leadership of all five political parties contesting the election, representatives of church groups, the Chamber of Industry and Commerce, the Commissioner of Police, and representatives of the media. As part of the consultative process the Observer Group travelled to Nevis on 30 June 1995. (A schedule of our engagements is at *Annex IV*.)

On Saturday 1 July 1995, our Group divided into five teams to be deployed into the 11 constituencies of St Kitts and Nevis. (A schedule of these deployments is at *Annex V*.) Before polling began on 3 July 1995 our teams travelled extensively throughout the country to gain familiarity with constituencies, assessing the degree of technical preparedness for the poll, witnessing the last days of the campaign and generally gauging the prevailing atmosphere.

On the eve of the election, our Chairman broadcast on television and radio a statement which sought to encourage a peaceful environment for the polling day, and to reassure voters as to the adequacy of the technical preparations for the poll. (A copy of this eve-of-poll statement, which was carried live on television throughout the Caribbean, is at *Annex VI*.) Following the usual practice of Commonwealth Observer Groups, we issued an Interim Statement on the evening of 3 July 1995 which again was carried live on television throughout the Caribbean. This statement was issued several hours after the close of the poll but before trends were evident in the counting. (A copy of that statement is at *Annex VII*.)