

## **Annex 4**

### **Interim Statement**



#### **Commonwealth Observer Group Papua New Guinea National Elections 2012**

### **INTERIM STATEMENT**

**Hon. Edward Natapei MP**  
**Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group**

*'Some of the benchmarks for democratic processes have been met, but several significant challenges remain to be addressed for the future.'*

The Commonwealth Observer Group has been present in Papua New Guinea since 16 June 2012. During this time we have met with a wide range of stakeholders, including the PNG Electoral Commission (PNGEC), the Integrity Commission, representatives of political parties, civil society, media, the international community, and other national and international observer groups. Commonwealth teams have observed voting in all four regions and 16 of PNG's 22 provinces. Our teams were also able to observe some counting in four provinces and the National Capital District. While deployed, our observers met with electoral officials, police, candidates, scrutineers, and ordinary voters in order to build up a larger picture of the conduct of the electoral process.

We are aware that due to the extended polling schedule, voting is yet to be completed in some provinces at the time of this statement. The counting is also ongoing, and most results are yet to be declared. This interim statement reflects in summary form the observations and assessments of the Commonwealth team on the electoral process up to this point. We will issue a Final Report at a later stage, containing our full conclusions and recommendations on the entire process.

#### **Key Findings**

Papua New Guinea's 2012 elections have seen some progress and some setbacks in the country's efforts to strengthen its democracy. Up to this point, some of the benchmarks for

democratic processes have been met, but several serious concerns need to be addressed for the future. Significant challenges remain to achieve the efficient and effective management of elections to ensure maximum franchise for citizens, appropriate and consistent electoral practices for the exercise of that franchise, and a strong culture of democracy throughout the country.

### *Legal Framework*

- Overall, the legal framework in PNG provides the necessary foundation for democratic elections. This includes universal suffrage, and the safeguarding of human rights such as freedom of association, assembly and movement.
- A major remaining obstacle to democracy is the widespread, deeply-rooted discrimination against women. The Group strongly emphasises the need to accelerate efforts to establish a legal framework and other measures to address the very uneven playing field for women's political participation.

### *The Campaign*

- Those with whom we met in the final days of the campaign period reported that the campaigning was competitive, and mostly peaceful. Candidates generally complied with the campaign deadline of 22 June 2012.
- However, concerns were raised with the Group about the rise of money politics in these elections, including widespread reported attempts by candidates to bribe voters directly, on a scale far greater than ever before. The Group encourages the further strengthening and enforcement of laws relating to campaign financing, bribery, treating and undue influence.

### *Election Management*

- The staff of the PNGEC, both in Port Moresby and around the country, worked hard in very challenging circumstances. Nevertheless, the Group observed that there was an unfortunate level of disorganisation and inconsistency in aspects of election management.
- Widespread delays in the polling schedule were of concern given their potential to confuse and disenfranchise voters, and the cost and security implications of further extending an already lengthy election period. Delays occurred in certain places due to weather conditions, but in many cases were caused by late distribution of polling materials and personnel, tardy payment of allowances to officials and security forces, and failures in logistics planning. Commonwealth observers sometimes detected a lack of urgency to ensure that the polling schedule was met. Attention needs to be given to the further strengthening of election management, including refining the systems for delegated authority to the provincial and district levels, to ensure the

necessary efficiency, oversight and accountability for a timely and effective poll.

### *Electoral Roll*

- The Group observed problems with the electoral roll in all provinces visited. The proportion of voters turned away varied between areas, and there were multiple apparent causes including: the integrity of the electoral roll itself, confusion over names used by voters, a lack of clarity in the allocation of voters to specific Wards, and the limited ability of polling officials to verify enrolment information on polling day.
- The widespread disenfranchisement of citizens of Papua New Guinea who wished to vote is a serious problem that must be addressed through a more reliable and efficient voter registration and electoral roll management system, including the incorporation of some form of voter identification, and better measures for verification and redress during polling. This issue has been repeatedly raised during past elections in PNG, including by Commonwealth observer groups. It must be addressed as an urgent priority following the 2012 election.

### *Voting*

- There were significant delays to the opening time of polling stations almost everywhere, and this was exacerbated by the observation of Group members in many places that polling stations also closed earlier than 6.00pm. Failure to accord sufficient respect to the designated polling times has the potential to disenfranchise voters, and is a serious concern.
- The Group witnessed wide variance in voting practices around the country. In coastal and islands provinces, the procedures were correctly followed in most respects and voters (whose names were located on the electoral roll) were able to exercise their votes freely and in secret.
- In the Highlands provinces, on the other hand, a great many anomalies were observed in the practice of voting. Most of the polling stations we visited did not provide for the secrecy of the ballot, with voting taking place in public and often being done by polling officials or even by candidates or scrutineers on behalf of voters. Our teams also saw multiple voting, 'bloc' voting, and apparently underage voters, in a number of locations.
- We were also concerned by reports of intimidation of voters by candidates and their supporters at certain polling locations.
- The Group welcomed the initiative taken to provide for voters with disability in the 2012 election. Members of the Group visited the dedicated facilities established for disabled voters in Port Moresby and Lae, and also witnessed disabled voters being

given priority and assistance in several other polling places. These steps toward empowering persons with disability as participants in the electoral process are laudable, and the Group hopes they can be further built upon in future elections.

### *The Count*

- Although there have been some procedural disputes and delays, the counting process, as observed by members of the Group so far, has been conducted in a transparent and diligent manner.
- A positive development observed by the Group was the new system for digital transmission of results from counting centres to the PNGEC, which allowed for timely updating of results on the PNGEC website and through the media. This has increased the transparency of the counting process, and is to be commended.
- The Group will continue to monitor the counting and results processes in the coming days.

### *Security*

- The Group welcomes the patience and restraint of the vast majority of people involved with the election, and the excellent work of many members of the security forces, which have resulted to date in a largely peaceful poll.
- There have been, however, some serious incidents of election-related violence, some of which resulted in the tragic loss of life and destruction of property. The Group is also aware of some attempts to disrupt the election in particular locations, including by hijacking or destroying ballot boxes. The Group welcomes the efforts of security forces to stop these actions and arrest their perpetrators, and urges all Papua New Guineans to refrain from criminal acts that interfere with the election process.
- Concerns were raised with the Group about some members of the security forces in certain areas acting in support of particular candidates. The Group emphasises that all security personnel must remain completely objective and impartial at all times in the performance of their duties.

At this crucial stage in the electoral process, the Commonwealth Observer Group urges all Papua New Guineans to continue to exercise patience and to allow the election process to be completed in a peaceful and lawful way. The Group likewise urges the PNGEC and other relevant authorities to ensure that the counting and results processes and those steps which follow, including any election-related legal matters, are concluded in a timely and transparent manner, in order to ensure full accountability for, and confidence in, the outcomes of the election.

Port Moresby, 11 July 2012