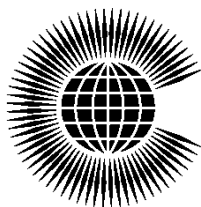


## **Annex 3**

### **Post-election Press Release**



## **COMMONWEALTH EXPERT TEAM CAMEROON PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION**

**9<sup>th</sup> October 2011**

**PRESS RELEASE**

**by  
Mr. Frederick A. Mitchell MP  
Chair of the Commonwealth Expert Team**

**A peaceful election: some benchmarks for democratic elections have been met, although the playing field needs to be levelled to increase confidence in the electoral process**

The Commonwealth was invited by the Ministry of External Relations to observe the 9<sup>th</sup> October Presidential Election, and the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth constituted a six person Expert Team supported by a professional staff team from the Secretariat in London. I am honoured to have been invited to Chair the Team which has been present in the country since 3 October 2011.

This statement is our initial view of the election. It reflects largely our observations in the run up to the election, the polling day itself and the counting process. The Commonwealth Expert Teams were based in five regions in the country. We exchanged our findings with a number of other international and domestic observers, as well as the diplomatic community. These exchanges corroborated most of the impressions which we formed during the course of our observations.

The election, thus far, has met some democratic benchmarks such as freedom of association, expression, as well as universal suffrage and the right to vote. This is an interim statement and it is issued prior to the formal declaration of the election results. We will issue a final report containing our conclusion and recommendations on the entire process at a later stage.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

### ***ELECAM must affirm its independence and must be supported to do so***

We laud the establishment of ELECAM as a significant first step.

This election is the first one organised by an independent election management body. We commend ELECAM's efforts in establishing key structures at the local level in a relatively short period of time; in collaborating with political parties and other stakeholders; and, in the organisation of Diaspora Voting, for the first time in the country's history.

It was, however, our impression that public confidence in ELECAM was limited. We noted serious concerns raised that ELECAM was not wholly independent of the government. We felt that this was due, in part, to the past political affiliations of some of the Electoral Board Members. ELECAM needs to do more to demonstrate its neutrality and inspire the confidence of the electorate in future elections. In this connection, it would be helpful if steps are taken in earnest to enhance the institutional autonomy of ELECAM.

ELECAM was constrained in its performance by the prevailing legal framework: we had the opportunity to discuss some of these constraints - such as the use of multiple ballot papers rather than a single ballot - with some of its board members. In this technical matter, as in others we will highlight in our final report, we are of the view that as the body mandated to manage and supervise elections, ELECAM must influence and drive the process of reform through the legislature and other relevant institutions. It must be supported and encouraged to do so.

### **The Voter register needs to be refined**

In the polling stations we visited, we observed that some voters had their voter identification cards, or receipts evidencing their application for voter cards, and in some cases, their National identification cards. However, their names were absent from the register and therefore they were unable to vote.

We also observed that while at some polling stations, provision was made for the collection of voter cards, many remained unclaimed.

In our assessment, the current voter register requires substantial refinement. We recognize the efforts made by ELECAM to this end, but would strongly encourage ELECAM to consider measures to significantly improve the voter register ahead of the 2012 legislative elections.

### **The election campaign: separating the role of party and state**

We commend the provision of state funding for political parties' activities during elections.

However, we noted repeated complaints from some stakeholders and members of the opposition about the lack of distinction between the state and the ruling party when it came to the use of state resources for campaigning. An example highlighted was the disproportionate coverage accorded to the ruling party's campaign by the state media as compared to that of the Opposition.

We appreciate the natural advantages that accrue to an incumbent government. However, the magnitude of resources that appeared to us to have been deployed by the ruling CPDM

party and its overwhelming advantage of incumbency challenged the notion of a level playing field in the entire process.

It is therefore important that the existing laws on election campaign financing, and media coverage during the campaign period be reviewed with the aim of strengthening accountability and transparency.

In the Commonwealth's election observation reports of 2004 and 2007 the pervasive influence of the ruling party in all aspects of the electoral process was highlighted as a major area of concern. If Cameroon is to further progress in the consolidation of its democracy, reforms in this area should be of top priority.

We also heard allegations from the main Opposition leader of the SDF, Mr John Fru Ndi at a political rally on Saturday 8th October, that he was prevented on two occasions from moving about the country to campaign because the ruling party's candidate had already been granted precedence to campaign in those particular areas.

The campaign of the ruling party's candidate should not be conducted to the detriment of other candidates. For future elections equitable arrangements should be put in place for election campaigns.

### **Polling Day**

On the whole, the election was peaceful. We note an improvement to preparations for these elections, as compared to previous ones. Voters who could vote expressed their will freely. The process was generally transparent. We commend the inclusion of large numbers of women in the local polling commissions.

We regret, however, that turnout appears to have been low in the areas that we observed. This, in our view, reinforces the repeated complaints about a pervasive sense of public apathy. We wish to highlight the following observations which will be further elaborated upon in our Final Report.

Generally polls opened on time, though we received some reports that in a number of areas there were delays. In some instances, this was attributed to a lack of preparedness on the part of election officials. In another case, the delay was caused by preparations being made for senior government officials and other personalities to vote.

The use of multiple ballots interfered with the smooth flow of the voting process and led to different procedures from station to station on how voters collected the ballot and disposed of them.

There were complaints about the ink and the inconsistent manner of its application. We also observed instances where the ink was washed off soon after its application. We would encourage the use of, and consistent application of indelible ink for future elections to safeguard the integrity of the process.

We also wish to underscore that it is considered best practice to apply the ink immediately upon issuance of a ballot paper to a voter.

## **The Commonwealth's partnership with Cameroon**

In some cases, ordinary citizens approached the Team to express various concerns regarding the overall management of the electoral process, the campaign period and seemed to suggest that the Commonwealth and other international organisations could resolve these issues.

The Commonwealth has engaged with Cameroon to deepen its democracy since it joined the organisation in 1995. We will continue to engage by making constructive recommendations and assisting the people and government of Cameroon to implement them. However, the people of Cameroon must play a central role in this process.

We believe that this country has to examine in the future how the issues that were brought to our attention, and those we have highlighted can be addressed to enhance the democratic credentials of Cameroon.

It is our hope that improvements will be effected in time for the next elections. In the meantime, it is our fervent hope that the results process will be managed in a transparent manner and without undue delay.

*Yaoundé, 12 October 2011*

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