

Chapter 1

Introduction

Invitation

At the invitation of the Chairperson of the National Electoral Commission of Rwanda, Prof Dr Chrysologue Karangwa, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Mr Kamallesh Sharma, constituted an Observer Group for the Rwanda Presidential Elections scheduled for 9 August 2010. In line with usual practice, the Secretary-General sent an Assessment Mission to Rwanda to assess the prevailing situation as well as the pre-electoral environment, prior to his final decision on whether to constitute a Commonwealth Observer Group. The Assessment Mission was in Rwanda from 17–23 April 2010.

The Group was led by H.E. Dr Salim Ahmed Salim, who served for 12 years as Secretary-General of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and is also a former Prime Minister of Tanzania, and comprised thirteen eminent persons in total. The Observer Group was supported by a five-member staff team from the Commonwealth Secretariat. A full list of members is at Annex 1.

Terms of Reference

"The Group is established by the Commonwealth Secretary-General at the request of the Chairman of the National Electoral Commission of Rwanda. It is to observe relevant aspects of the organisation and conduct of the Presidential Elections which are scheduled to take place on 9 August 2010, in accordance with the laws of Rwanda.

The Group is to consider the various factors impinging on the credibility of the electoral process as a whole. It will determine in its own judgement whether the elections have been conducted according to the standards for democratic elections to which Rwanda has committed itself, with reference to national election-related legislation and relevant regional, Commonwealth and other international commitments.

The Group is to act impartially and independently and shall conduct itself according to the standards expressed in the International Declaration of Principles to which the Commonwealth is a signatory. 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. In its Final Report, the Group is also free to propose to the authorities concerned recommendations for change on institutional, procedural and other matters as would assist the holding of future elections.

The Group is to submit its report to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, who will forward it to the Government of Rwanda, the Chairman of the National Electoral Commission of Rwanda, political and civil society organisations and thereafter to all Commonwealth Governments."

Activities

The Observer Group was present in Rwanda from 2 August. During four days of briefings, the Group met with the National Electoral Commission of Rwanda, political party representatives, civil society groups, women's groups, media, Commonwealth High Commissioners, international organisations, domestic and international observer missions.

The Observer Group was deployed on 7 August. Two-person teams travelled to each of the country's four provinces, North, East, South and West, plus Kigali City, and co-ordinated closely with other domestic, regional and international observers, building up a comprehensive picture of the conduct of the process.

During the deployment phase, Commonwealth Observers also met with Mayors, Provincial and District National Electoral Commission Co-ordinators, security officials, Regional and District representatives of political parties, polling agents, polling officers, voters and the media.

On the basis of the Group's initial findings and observations, the Chairperson issued an Interim Statement on 10 August (Annex 3). The Group's Report was completed in Kigali prior to departure and transmitted to the Commonwealth Secretary-General on 16 August 2010.