

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

At the invitation of the Government of Guyana, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Mr Kamallesh Sharma, constituted an Observer Group for the 28 November 2011 National and Regional Elections. In line with usual practice, the Secretary-General sent an Assessment Mission to Guyana to assess the pre-electoral environment, prior to his final decision on whether to constitute a Commonwealth Observer Group. The Assessment Mission was in the country from 22 to 27 October 2011.

The Commonwealth Observer Group for the 28 November 2011 elections was led by the Hon. Denis Marshall QSO, who is a former Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association as well as a former government minister in New Zealand, and comprised thirteen eminent persons in total. The Observer Group was supported by a six-person 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 Government of Guyana. It is to observe relevant aspects of the organisation and conduct of the elections which are scheduled to take place on 28 November 2011, in accordance with the laws of Guyana.*

*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 judgment whether the elections have been conducted according to the standards for democratic elections to which Guyana 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 judgment 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 Guyana, the Guyana Elections Commission, political parties and civil society organizations and thereafter to all Commonwealth Governments."*

### Activities

The Observer Group was present in Guyana from 21 November to 5 December 2011. During four days of briefings, the Group met with the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM), political party representatives, civil society groups, **women's groups**, youth representatives, media, Commonwealth High Commissioners, other diplomats, and national and other international observer missions.

An Arrival Statement was issued on 23 November 2011 (see Annex 2). The Observer Group was deployed from 26-30 November 2011. Teams reported from eight of the ten Regions of Guyana. During deployment teams followed the close of the campaign and met with election officials, political party and civil society representatives, police as well as members of the public and other observers in their respective areas to build up a comprehensive picture of the conduct of the process.

**On the basis of the Group's initial findings and observations, the Chairperson issued an Interim Statement on 30 November 2011 (Annex 3). The Group's Final Report was completed in Georgetown prior to departure and transmitted to the Commonwealth Secretary-General on 4 December 2011.**