



**EASTERN AFRICA STANDBY FORCE (EASF) ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION (EOM)
TO THE GENERAL ELECTIONS ON 14 JANUARY IN
THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA**

Preliminary Report

Kampala

15 January 2021

Introduction

The Eastern Africa Standby Force (EASF) deployed an Election Observation Mission (EOM) to the Republic of Uganda following the invitation by the Government. The EOM's objective was to observe and assess the conduct of the Presidential and Parliamentary electoral process.

The EASF Election Observer Mission (EOM) Team is led by H.E. Ambassador Ahamada Hamadi from the Union of the Comoros. The Senior Mission leadership team also comprises of the Deputy Head of Mission Mr. Dawit Assefa, supported by a Management Team. The Mission is composed of twenty (20) observers from eight (8) EASF countries namely; Comoros, Burundi, Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, Seychelles and Ethiopia. The EOM Team comprising of Election Management Experts and Support Component from the Secretariat arrived in Kampala on 10th January 2021.

The assessment of the EASF Mission was based on the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR 1966), the African Union Declaration on the principles of democratic elections (2005), African Union Guidelines for Election Observations and Monitoring Missions (2002), the African Charter on Democracy, Election and Governance (ACDEG 2007), Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and Code of conduct for International Election Observers as well as the current legal framework governing elections in the Republic of Uganda.

Objectives of EASF EOM Mission

EASF EOM undertook the following objectives;

1. To carry out an objective and impartial assesment of the process.
2. To provide a timely and independent report of the process
3. To promote the conduct of credible elections and contribute to the consolidation of democracy, good governance, peace and stability in the country.

Methodology of the EASF EOM Mission

- Interaction with stakeholders involved in the electoral process, notably the Government of the Republic of Uganda, Electoral Commission of Uganda, political actors, Media, political parties and independent Candidates/representatives, Coalition of CSOs, local domestic observer groups and International Observer groups like IGAD and EAC.
- Holding briefing sessions for Observers with a focus on use of tools for the collection and compilation of electoral data.
- Deployment of observers in 10 teams in Mbarara, Lira, Gulu, Kampala, Mbale, Masindi, Wakiso, Mpigi, Entabe and Mityana.

This preliminary statement is based on the data collected from the field, on the overall environment within which the vote was conducted, the opening of polling stations, voting, counting and from the meetings held by observer teams with stakeholders in the electoral process.

Preliminary findings and observations

- **Political context**

The Presidential and Parliamentary elections of 14 January 2021 in the Republic of Uganda were conducted as the 4th multiparty elections since the return to multi-party politics in 2005. The Mission observed that there were 11 Presidential Candidates 5 from Political parties whilst 6 from Independent Candidates.

The 2021 elections were held in the backdrop of handling the COVID19 in the Country whilst ensuring the pandemic does not spread further during the campaign and nomination period.

- **Legal framework**

In addition to the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (1995), the 2021 Elections were conducted under the Electoral Commission Act, Cap 140 as well as legal frameworks on Election Management. The Constitution provides for universal, equal, secret and direct suffrage, existence of political parties, the right of women to equitable representation; and the rights to the freedoms of expression and assembly.

- **Election administration**

The findings also indicate that the Electoral Commission of Uganda is vested with the responsibility to direct and supervise all aspects relating to the conduct of elections including; constituency delimitation, registration and regulation of political parties, registration of voters, civic and voter education, establishment of polling units, and prosecution of electoral offences.

The EC comprises a Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson and five other Commissioners who are appointed by the President with the approval of Parliament. The tenure of office for each member is seven years and can be renewed for one more term.

- **Media**

The EASF EOM observed Uganda has a diverse media sector, there are nearly 300 licensed radio stations and 30 (free to air) TV stations with a wide coverage across the Country.

Besides the mainstream print and electronic media, campaigning was carried out through social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp. This could be attributed to the Government directive that no physical meetings would be held in an effort to curtail COVID 19 in the Country. The majority of voters were young people use the social media to communicate. EASF EOM notes with satisfaction the active role of journalists and the media houses in

covering the election process and in voters' education however, we noted unbalanced reporting in the state funded media and lack of clear editorial policy.

- **Civil society**

The Mission noted a very active Civil Society with presence in most areas across the Country. They provided a wide range of programs with a view of educate voters on the electoral process.

Election day observation

The EASF EOM deployed 20 observers in teams of two throughout the country to observe Election-Day activities. The ten (10) teams observed the opening, polling and closing processes. In addition, they observed the general environment within which polling was taking place. They visited 9 Districts namely Mbarara, Lira, Gulu, Kampala, Mbale, Masindi, Wakiso, Mpigi and Mityana; and a total of 133 polling stations.

- **Opening of polling stations**

In the polling stations observed, the Mission noted that some opened late. This late opening was attributed to delays in organising, delivering and arranging of electoral materials at polling stations. The Biometric Voter Verification System/Kits (BVVS/K) jammed in some of the polling stations delaying the opening of polling. A total of 88% of the polling stations observed, opened late.

- **Election materials**

The Mission observed that election materials were available in sufficient quantities in all polling stations visited. Ballot boxes were observed to be generally well sealed.

- **Turnout**

EASF EOM observed that the election turnout was generally high in most polling stations visited.

- **Gender Participation**

EASF EOM observed a satisfactory gender presence and participation in most of polling stations visited.

The EASF EOM noted that women were the majority amongst the electoral personnel and representatives of political parties at the Polling stations.

There was also a large number of young people working as polling officials

- **Election personnel**

The EASF EOM observed that in all of the polling stations visited, the required number of 6 polling personnel was met.

In most of the polling stations visited the Presiding Officers looked overwhelmed as they were part of the polling staff and had little time or non at all to know what was going around the polling station.

- **Voting**

The EASF EOM observed that the vote was generally conducted in a calm atmosphere in most parts of the country. The polling stations were properly managed by the officials to guarantee the secrecy of the vote.

In most of the polling stations observed, priority was given to persons with disability, the aged, expectant and nursing mothers. The EASF EOM notes that assistance was given to persons unable to vote.

- **Party agents (representation of candidates in polling stations)**

The Mission observed huge presence of candidate representatives in polling stations visited. Some parties/candidates had almost five (5) party agents per polling station throughout the polling process.

In most polling stations visited the party/candidate agents were more than the polling staff.

- **Security**

The EASF EOM also observed visible presence of security forces at the polling stations, maintaining law and order. EASF Election Observer Mission notes with satisfaction the presence of the security officers in all polling station visited however, we noted numerous reports from stakeholders about police brutality and excess use of force by law enforcements personnel during the electoral process.

- **Closing and counting**

It was observed that voters who were on the queue at closing time were allowed to vote. The closing and counting procedures at most polling stations were adhered to.

The Election Day operations were generally administered in a manner that allowed the free expression of the will of the voters.

- **COVID 19 Protocols**

In many polling stations visited there were no handwashing places however sanitizers were present. The polling constable was mainly the one sanitizing the voters in the queues. Social distancing was not observed in all the polling stations visited and queues, however in the voting areas social distancing was well observed during voting.

Conclusion

At the end of observation, the EASF EOM Team concludes that the Presidential and Parliamentary Elections of 14 January 2021 in the Republic of Uganda was conducted in calm and peaceful manner.

The EASF EOM Team wishes to express its appreciation to the authorities in the Republic of Uganda for the measures put in place to facilitate its work throughout its stay in the country.

Recommendations

In line with the above, the EASF EOM wishes to make the following recommendations:

To the Government:

- Continue and intensify efforts of open dialogue aimed at promoting an atmosphere of confidence building between all the stakeholders including actors of the society in the Republic of Uganda;
- Strengthen an inclusive approach in the adoption and application of constitutional, institutional and electoral reforms;
- Give priority to the creation of a conducive environment for dialogue between all political actors.

To Electoral Commission (EC) Uganda:

- Consider using indoor polling in order to create order around the stations and to protect the polling officials, voters and materials from weather elements.
- Consider adopting voting booths that are conventionally used in the region and continent, to protect the secrecy of the ballot.
- Make provision for recording names of people who have been turned away.
- Ensure full autonomy and independence of EMB without interference from government and other stakeholders.
- Increase civic awareness and voter education
- Ensure a level playfield for all political parties and candidates

To Political actors:

- Contribute to the permanent framework for political dialogue;
- Place the interest of national cohesion above all partisan considerations;

To Civil Society:

Work to increase its involvement in the electoral process notably: -

- In conducting continuous civic and voter education to create awareness;
- To continue participating in a non-partisan and impartial election observation.

To Security Forces:

- Encourages Security Forces to enforce the law equally on all parties and candidates.
- Ensure that law enforcement agencies adhere to the principles' human rights
- Discharge their functions in a professional manner without use of excessive force

To Media and communication:

The shutdown of social media and internet on the eve of election day, during and after election day violated the rights of citizens to access information and free dissemination of information.

Thus,

- Adopt clear editorial policies to prevent media especially state media from bias reporting and ensure fair and equitable coverage to all political parties and candidates.
- The Uganda Communications Commission need to come up with clear guidelines on the use of social media platforms with a view of curbing the rise of misinformation especially during the electoral period as observed in this Elections.

Done in Kampala this Friday, 15 January 2021

For the Mission

H.E. Ambassador Ahamada Hamadi

Head of Mission