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PRESS STATEMENT

AFRICAN UNION ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION TO THE 3-4 AUGUST 2017 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN THE REPUBLIC OF RWANDA

6 August 2017

Kigali

AUEOM reports a peaceful, orderly and transparent voting process

INTRODUCTION

- On 3-4 August 2017, Rwandans went to the polls to elect their national president. The election was the third Presidential election since the end of the Rwandan Genocide in 1994. Previous elections were held in 2003 and 2010. Paul Kagame of the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) contested for a new mandate after having won both the 2003 and 2010 elections with overwhelming majority.
- The African Union Election Observation Mission to the 3-4 August 2017 Presidential Election was composed of 34 observers from 23 African countries. The mission arrived in Rwanda on 23 July 2017. After a three day briefing on AU observation Methodology and the political context of the elections, the mission observers were deployed on 1 August 2017 to cover all the 5 Provinces and 30 districts of Rwanda. In their areas of deployment, the observers interacted with key electoral stakeholders.
- The African Union Election Observation Mission's assessment of the elections was based on the relevant African Union instruments, namely, the 2007 African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance; the 2002 OAU/AU Declaration on Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa; and the 2002 Guidelines for AU Electoral Observation and Monitoring Missions, as well as the Legal Framework for Elections in Rwanda and international instruments for democratic elections.
- This statement presents the preliminary findings of the African Union Election Observation Mission and highlights the Mission's key findings, main conclusions and recommendations on the 4 August 2017 Presidential Elections.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- Since its arrival, the African Union Election Observation Mission noted a generally peaceful and calm environment before, during and after the 4 August 2017 presidential election. In particular, the Mission noted, the orderly and cheerful manner with which the Rwandan people went to vote.
- The legal framework for the elections including the constitution and the electoral law protects fundamental freedoms and is generally in line with international standards for elections. The mission noted that the election was conducted in line with the legal framework and regulations of the country. However, the mission noted that there is no provision for the financing of electoral campaigns in the legal framework.
- The Mission noted that the National Electoral Commission was adequately prepared for the elections and adhered to the election calendar. The mission further noted that the use of volunteers as polling staff and the local

production of election materials including ballot materials contributed to the lowering of the cost of the election.

- Since its arrival, the mission noted that campaigning was done in a peaceful and calm manner.
- The mission noted that the law did not provide recourse for disqualified aspirant to challenge the decision of the National Electoral Commission.
- The mission noted with satisfaction the high participation of women and youth in the electoral process, particularly as voters and electoral staff.
- The mission observed a well-administered voting process. All polling rooms visited by AU observers opened on time and had sufficient election materials. The opening, voting, closing and counting procedures were largely adhered to by election staff, except in some cases where counting procedures such as reconciliation were not strictly followed.
- In most polling stations visited, AU observers noted the presence of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) party agents, with little or no representation for the other candidates.

Recommendations

The mission makes the following preliminary recommendations for consideration by Rwandan stakeholders for the improvement of future elections in Rwanda:

- Consider reviewing the provisions allowing persons with official duties on election day to vote where they are not originally registered, in order to avoid complication in managing the counting process.
- Consider introducing mechanisms of validating ballots papers on Election Day in order to prevent the use of counterfeit ballots.
- Consider improving the training of polling staff on election procedures, particularly counting procedures in order to ensure accuracy and increased confidence in the process.
- Consider deployment of sufficient representatives to polling stations in order to ensure transparent and credible management of the voting processes.
- Encourage more women to stand for the highest office in the country.
- Consider amending the legislation to provide campaign funding for candidates in order to ensure a level playing field.
- Consider the introduction of legislation that will regulate the campaign spending by parties and candidates, including provisions for disclosure of sources of campaign funding.
- Consider the introduction of legislation that provides avenues or remedies for disqualified aspirants to challenge their disqualification.

Conclusions

- Based on its observation, the African Union Election Observation Mission concludes that the voting process was conducted in a peaceful, orderly and transparent manner. The mission commends the Rwandan people for turning out in their large numbers which demonstrates their commitment to their country's democratic processes.
- The mission noted that the tabulation and announcement of results was concluded in a speedy manner, and that according to provisional results released by the electoral commission, the incumbent Paul Kagame of the RPF won the election with an overwhelming majority.
- The mission further noted and commends the acceptance of the election result by the two losing candidates.
- The mission will issue its final report on the entire electoral process within two months of the end of the elections. The report will provide a more comprehensive assessment of the process, including the immediate post-election environment.
- The Mission wishes to extend its gratitude to the Rwandan authorities for facilitating its work throughout the country.