



THE AFRICAN UNION OBSERVER MISSION TO THE 26 FEBRUARY 2012 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN SENEGAL

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

I. INTRODUCTION

In response to an invitation from the Government of Senegal and the Autonomous National Electoral Commission (ANEC), H.E. Jean Ping, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission constituted and dispatched an Election Observer Mission to Senegal in order to observe the Presidential elections which took place on Sunday 26 February, 2012.

The African Union (AU) Election Observer Mission is led by His Excellency Olusegun Obasanjo, former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The Mission comprised 28 members drawn from Elections Management Bodies (EMBs), the Pan African Parliament, African Ambassadors accredited to the African Union, members of Civil Society Organisations from various African countries. The Mission is assisted by a team of technical staff from the AU Commission, the Pan African Parliament and the Electoral Institute for the Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA).

The Mission Observers were drawn from 19 African countries namely: Algeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Congo-Brazzaville, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Malawi, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nigeria, Niger, Saharawi Arab Republic, Sierra Leone, Togo, Tunisia, and Zambia.

The AU Observer Mission arrived on 18 February 2012 and will remain in the country until 3 March 2012. The Mission has made its assessment of the electoral process in Senegal on the basis of the information gathered during meetings with relevant stakeholders and observation of the process. The preliminary findings of the Mission and subsequent recommendations are presented in this interim statement. A final report, providing an in depth and comprehensive analysis of the observations and recommendations of the Mission on the entire election process will be compiled and made available through the Office of the Chairperson of the African Union.

II. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY OF OBSERVATION

The AU Observer Mission observed the Presidential elections of 26 February 2012 in Senegal within the spirit and letter of the Durban Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa, as adopted by the Assembly of the African Union in July 2002 and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance which entered into force on 15 February, 2012. The main objective of the Mission was to make an honest, independent and impartial observation and assess the organisation and conduct of the Presidential elections.

The specific objectives of the Mission were to:

- Assess whether conditions existed for the conduct of elections that allow the people of Senegal to freely express their will;
- Assess and determine whether the elections were conducted in accordance with the constitutional and legal framework for elections in Senegal

In accordance with the African Union Guidelines for Election Observation and Monitoring, the Mission met and consulted with various stakeholders involved in the electoral process. These included representatives of Political Parties, various election candidates, Civil Society Organisations, the Media, the Ministry in charge of Elections, and the Autonomous National Electoral Commission (ANEC), as well as other international observer missions such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the European Union.

Before deployment to various regions in the country, the AU Observers underwent an induction on election observation and attended briefings on the electoral process by several key stakeholders.

Ten teams consisting of two or three observers each were deployed on 24 February 2012 to observe elections in the different regions of Senegal. The teams were based in the following regions:

Dakar;
Diourbel;
Fatick;
Kaffrine,
Kaolack;
Kolda;
Louga;
Saint-Louis;
Sedhiou;

Thies;
Zinguinchor

The different teams carried out further consultations with relevant election stakeholders in their areas of deployment and were able to observe the concluding stages of the election campaign, while identifying polling centres where they observed the voting and the counting processes.

III. PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

After considering relevant legislation and documentation, statements by electoral stakeholders, media reports, and observations made by its different teams deployed on the ground, and basing itself on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa, the African Union Observer Mission has made the following preliminary findings:

Political Context

The AU Observer Mission notes that the elections of 26 February 2012 took place within a much polarised political context with contestation of some citizens against the candidature of the incumbent President for the third term. This contestation has been marked by incidences of violence in Dakar and other major towns which has caused loss of lives and scores of injuries. The Mission also notes that there were calls for boycott of these elections from some political quarters.

Registration of Candidates

The Mission noted that some of the candidatures were rejected by the Constitutional Council for failing to attain the required threshold for nomination. This consequently resulted in denying some candidates the right to contest in the elections.

Electoral Campaign Process

According to the Electoral Law, the electoral campaign began on 4 February 2012 and ended on 24 February 2012. The AU Observer Mission was able to observe the final days of the campaign conducted by various contestants in the elections. The Mission noted that the campaigns were conducted in an atmosphere characterised by pre-existing political tensions.

POLLING DAY OBSERVATION

Opening of Polls

According to election procedures, the polling stations were to open at 8.am and close at 6pm. Most of the polling stations visited by AU observers across the country were opened on time. However, in some areas, there were short delays for various reasons such as the late delivery of election materials and slow set-up of the polling stations.

The Mission notes with satisfaction that the polling day was generally peaceful and no major incidences were observed or brought to the attention of the Mission that may have impacted negatively on the voting process and outcome of the elections in the areas of deployment.

Voter Turn-Out

The turn-out of voters was generally average in most polling stations observed. In some instances, voter participation was less than half of the registered voters.

Voter Register and Identification

In most polling stations observed, voters produced voter cards and National ID Card as required by the electoral law. However, there were cases where voters did not possess their voter cards and consequently were not permitted to vote. In other cases, some voters had their voter cards and National ID cards but their names did not feature in the voters' register; they were therefore not allowed to vote.

It is also worth noting that there were voters who were not able to identify their polling stations and therefore were directed to the polling stations where they were supposed to vote.

Balloting

The balloting process was generally simple and comprehensible to voters. The processing time per voter was generally short and voters were not kept in the queue for long period of time. While most voters understood the voting process, there were some instances where voters had to be assisted by the polling officials in order to vote.

The layout of most polling stations observed guaranteed secrecy of the ballot in view of placement of the voting booth.

Polling Personnel

The polling personnel generally performed competently in their election-day duties in areas observed. The level of competence observed by the AU Mission is indicative of the fact that election personnel were provided adequate training. However, it was observed that in some polling stations voting was temporarily suspended during the lunch period.

The Mission noted with satisfaction a significant number of women amongst the polling officials.

Security, Observers and Political Party Agents

The presence of security officials was observed in all the stations visited. Their presence at the stations was unobstructive and non-intimidating. Where necessary they reacted promptly to prevent any scuffles. Political party agents were also present in most polling stations visited. However, it was noted in some cases that not all candidates were represented in the polling stations by the party agents. National and international observers were also present in most polling stations visited.

Closing of the Polls and Counting Process

In most polling stations observed, the polls closed in accordance with election procedures. The counting process was subsequently conducted in a transparent manner in the presence of political party agents, observers and the media. There was sufficient light during the counting process.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the observations and findings made by its different teams, the African Union Observer Mission recommends that:

- Constant political dialogue amongst all stakeholders in the electoral process should be encouraged in order to promote consensus on critical political issues;
- There be more diligence in the process of nomination of candidates by objectively ascertaining names of nominees;
- Measures should be taken to ensure registered voters get their voter cards on time to avoid being disenfranchised;
- Measures should be taken to ensure continuity of voting operations throughout the polling process;
- Voter education should be ensured in order to enhance effective participation of voters by the electoral authorities, political parties and civil society organisations.

V. CONCLUSION:

In view of the observations made thus far, the AU Observer Mission would like to declare that the elections in the Republic of Senegal were conducted in accordance with the Durban Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa, as adopted by the Assembly of the African Union in July 2002 and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance which entered into force on 15 February, 2012.

The Mission's general observation of the elections is that they were conducted in adherence with the set regulations as provided in the legal framework of Senegal.

Despite the minor hitches experienced in the electoral process, the AU Mission considers that these were not of a nature to impact on the free expression of the will of the people of Senegal.

The African Union Observer Mission wishes to urge all the Political Parties, Candidates and other stakeholders to use the legally established channels or mechanisms to voice any dispute or electoral grievances they may have in relation to the on-going electoral process.

The African Union Mission wishes to acclaim and congratulate the People of Senegal for the political maturity they demonstrated during these Presidential elections which were conducted in a peaceful atmosphere. The Mission would also like to congratulate the security forces for their professionalism in maintaining order during the polling day, and the media for the coverage of the elections.

The African Union Observer Mission urges all Political Parties and their respective Candidates to accept the outcome of the elections to be announced by the Constitutional Council. The African Union will continue to monitor the rest of the electoral process.

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