



THE AFRICAN UNION OBSERVER MISSION TO THE 25 MARCH 2012 RUN OFF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN SENEGAL

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

I. INTRODUCTION

In response to an invitation from the Government of Senegal and the Autonomous National Electoral Commission (CENA), 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 run-off Presidential elections which took place on Sunday 25 March, 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 26 members drawn from Election Management Bodies (EMBs), the Pan African Parliament, African Ambassadors accredited to the African Union, and 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 Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA).

The Mission Observers were drawn from 18 African countries namely: Algeria, 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 17 March 2012 and will remain in the country until 01 April 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 Run Off Presidential elections of 25 March 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; and
- Assess whether the final results reflect the will of the Senegalese people.

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 the two election Candidates, Civil Society Organisations, the Media, the Constitutional Council, the Ministry in charge of Elections, Autonomous National Electoral Commission (CENA), national and international observer missions, and the French Ambassador accredited to Senegal.

Before deployment to various regions in the country, the AU Observers held a briefing to acquaint themselves of new developments that had taken place in the lead up to the Run Off elections .

Eleven teams consisting of two or three observers each were deployed on 23 March 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;
Thies;
Ziguinchor

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 and the Election Campaign Process

Unlike the context surrounding the First Round of the Presidential elections which was highly polarised, sometimes with incidences of violence which caused loss of lives, the AU Observer Mission has noted with satisfaction that the Run Off Presidential elections of 25 March 2012 took place within a peaceful atmosphere. The election campaign that began fifteen days before the polls was conducted by the two presidential aspirants with no significant incidences recorded. The Mission has also noted the continued important role played by the media in covering the electoral process and keeping the citizens informed accordingly.

POLLING DAY OBSERVATION

Opening of Polls

Most of the polling stations visited by AU observers across the country opened at 8am as stipulated in the election procedures and voters were already in the queue to vote at the opening time. The electoral materials were also available in sufficient quantity in most polling stations visited.

Voter Turn-Out

There was a generally high voter turn-out in Dakar as observed in the polling station visited. However, like observed in the First Round of Presidential elections, the turn-out of voters in other Regions was generally average in most polling stations visited. 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 and were duly identified in the voters' register before being issued ballot paper.

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. This was especially the case for the elderly people.

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. Indeed, unlike in the First Round where voting process was temporarily stopped during the lunch hour period in some polling stations, no similar case was noted in polling stations visited by AU observers during the Run Off elections.

The Mission also noted with satisfaction that a significant number of women were 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 as observed. Political party agents were also present in most polling stations visited.

Closing of the Polls and the Counting Process

In most polling stations observed, the polls closed at 6pm 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. The AU Observers noted that the report of counting operations was duly signed by the polling officials and representatives of the Candidates and thereafter posted outside the polling stations in adherence to election procedures. No irregularities in the counting process was observed or brought to the attention of the Mission.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

The African Union Observer Mission notes with satisfaction that some of the recommendations made during the First Round of Elections were taken into consideration by the Senegalese electoral authorities which contributed to the improved quality of the Run-Off Presidential elections such as ensuring continuity of voting

operations throughout the polling process. However, some of the recommendations previously made will need long term reforms such as institutionalising multi-stakeholder dialogue in the legal framework to promote an inclusive engagement on critical electoral issues.

The AU Observer Mission has noted a recurrence of general low voter turn-out during the Run Off elections; and therefore recommends that the election stakeholders analyse the causes of this shortcoming and adopt remedial measures to ensure increased voter participation in future electoral processes.

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 in adherence to the legal framework of Senegal. The people of Senegal were able to freely express their will. Future measures to ensure increased voter participation will however be necessary in order to promote the exercise of democratic rights by the Senegalese citizens.

The African Union Mission wishes to congratulate the People of Senegal for the political maturity demonstrated during the Run Off Presidential elections which were conducted in a peaceful atmosphere. The Mission particularly congratulates the outgoing President for his initiative to congratulate his successor even before the official proclamation of results. This gesture will go a long way in the consolidation of democracy in Senegal.

The Mission would also like to congratulate the electoral authorities and the security forces respectively for their professionalism in the management of the elections and in maintaining order during the polling day. The Mission also congratulates the media for the coverage of the elections.

The African Union will continue to monitor the rest of the electoral process.

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