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**AFRICAN UNION ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION TO THE 7  
OCTOBER 2018 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN THE REPUBLIC OF  
CAMEROON**

**PRELIMINARY STATEMENT**

**YAOUNDE, 9 OCTOBER 2018**

**A. INTRODUCTION**

1. On 7 October, 2018, Cameroonians went to the polls to elect the country's next President.
2. The African Union (AU) deployed an Election Observation Mission (EOM) led by H.E. Artheme Kwesi S. Ahoomey Zunu, former Prime Minister of the Togolese Republic; in line with provisions of the 2017 African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, which came into force in 2012, the 2012 OAU/AU Declaration of principles governing Democratic Elections in Africa, the 2002 African Union Guidelines for Elections Observation and Monitoring Mission as well as Cameroonian Constitution and Laws.
3. The African Union Election Observation Mission (AUEOM) comprises of 11 long-term observers deployed since 4 September 2018, later joined on 3 October 2018 by 22 short-term election observers. The Mission consists of Ambassadors accredited to the African Union, Election Management Boards members and the Civil Society.
4. In this preliminary statement, the AUEOM offers a summary of key observations on the electoral process thus far.

5. This statement is preliminary because it is issued while the tabulation and announcement of results are ongoing and, therefore, an assessment of the entire electoral process cannot be provided at this stage.

## **B. General Political Environment**

6. The 7 October 2018 presidential elections was held within a political environment that was generally peaceful, although there were some security challenges, in particular, the North West and South West regions caused by the Ambaboy's armed group and Far North region caused by the Boko Haram insurgents. Notably, the security environment resulted in curtailment of civil and political liberties in these regions of Cameroon, thereby impacting negatively on the level of participation of citizens in the electoral process. The AUEOM noted that the foregoing challenges resulted in limited consensus among political players on a number of issues about the electoral process namely, the question of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), provision of security for all polling stations, including electoral personnel, materials and voters in these regions.

7. The presidential election comprised a contest of nine candidates who were duly nominated including the incumbent President. The AUEOM noted that one of the opposition candidates withdrew from the contest in favour of another opposition candidate, two days to the polling.

## **C. Legal Framework**

8. The presidential elections are conducted within the framework of the Constitution of 1972 as amended in 1996 and 2008, the Electoral Code 2012 as amended as well as various Presidential decrees and other regulations. The presidential decrees, in particular, play a crucial role in shaping the framework for conduct of elections. This entails, inter alia, fixing of the date for elections; allocation of funding for candidates; fixing the time for opening and closing of polls; appointment of members of the Directorate General of Elections and Electoral Board of the Elections Cameroon (ELECAM), as well as appointment of members of the Constitutional Council, the Court of Appeal and Tribunals. In line with the principles and values of the African Charter on Democracy Elections and Governance (ACDEG) of which Cameroon has ratified in 2012, the AUEOM notes that the current framework needs to be strengthened in order to safeguard the democratic principles of separation of powers, fairness, independence and impartiality.

9. The electoral system for electing the president is the First Past The Post (FPTP), where a candidate is declared a winner through a simple majority. The AUEOM noted that majority of stakeholders were of the opinion that there is need for a consensual review of

the system to enhance the threshold for election of president by taking into account the social and political context of the country.

#### **D. Electoral Administration**

10. ELECAM has the overall mandate of organizing elections and referenda. However, this mandate for management of elections in Cameroon is distributed among various institutions namely the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization (MINAT) and the Constitutional Council. MINAT is tasked with accreditation of observers and security of elections while the Constitution Council has a mandate not only to announce results but also to arbitrate disputes related to presidential elections. The AUEOM noted that accreditation process was cumbersome to both international and citizen election observation missions.

11. The AUEOM noted that the ELECAM made significant attempts to keep the stakeholders informed about the progress of the electoral process through initiating consultative fora in order to ensure that the process is transparent and inclusive. The AUEOM equally noted that ELECAM made efforts to prepare for the presidential polls such as training of polling personnel and deployment of electoral materials despite prevailing security and operational challenges. Also noteworthy were the efforts to transfer voters who wished to be transferred from unsafe zones to safe zones as well as the relocation of polling stations from military zones and traditional chiefs' houses to a public building as per provisions in the Electoral Code.

12. The AUEOM noted that there was limited consensus amongst political stakeholders on how to manage voting for IDPs, despite measures undertaken by ELECAM. In the North West and South West Regions, the AUEOM equally noted that the Ambaboyos from these regions have reportedly warned voters not to participate in the polls.

13. The AUEOM would like to further commend ELECAM for undertaking comprehensive measures to ensure that People Living with Disabilities (PWDs) are enfranchised through adoption of braille ballot paper, sign language interpreters and ramps for accessing the polling stations. These measures are crucial to ensuring inclusive and participatory governance and is in line with the Protocol of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa (referred to as the Africa Disability Protocol).

## **E. Voter Registration**

14. ELECAM conducted registration of voters for the presidential election from the 1 January until the 9 July 2018. The AUEOM noted that the registration system does not provide for issuance of voters' cards on the spot as registered voters are supposed to return at a later date to obtain their voters' cards. The Mission further noted that identification of voters at the polling stations would be based on presentation of a National Identity Card or Voters' Card to enable a voter cast their ballot. The AUEOM further noted that although the distribution of voters' cards continued in most parts of the country until the elections day, not all citizens who had registered were in possession of their cards on polling day.

## **F. Electoral Campaign and Financing**

15. The electoral campaign was officially launched on 22 September 2018, fifteen (15) days prior the Presidential election in accordance with Article 87 (1) of the Electoral Code. The AUEOM noted that the campaign environment was generally peaceful, despite some security challenges which impacted on the process in the North West and South West regions.

16. In line with article 281(1) of the electoral code, the first tranche of the state funding for the presidential election was approximately 15 million FCFA per candidate. This was disbursed three (3) days before the commencement of the campaigns. The AUEOM noted that the amount and timing for disbursement of campaign funds impacted on the capacity of some candidates to engage in effective campaign process.

17. The AUEOM also noted the absence of the legal framework that regulates the participation of government officials and the use of state resources in the electoral campaign.

## **G. Role of Women in the Electoral Process**

18. The AUEOM has noted the absence of female candidates contesting the presidential elections. In spite of this, it was noted that women organizations were engaged in sensitization activities where they were calling for peaceful participation as well as mobilization of voters in the electoral process.

## **H. The Media**

19. The Law N°92/030 of 13 February 1992, guarantees the equal access to airtime in public media for political parties and candidates during electoral campaigning. The National Communication Council (NCC) is entrusted with the regulation of the media sector and monitoring of the allocation of airtime to different candidates. The AUEOM noted that during a press conference held on 1 October 2018, the NCC pledged support to be transparent in the allocation of airtime to contestants. However, it was noted that the coverage of election campaigns was not balanced as the national television (CRTV), radio and the print media (Cameroon Tribune), accorded three (3) times more coverage to candidate of the ruling party.

### **I. Civic and Voter Education**

20. Civic and voter education is a prerequisite of all key stakeholders in the electoral process. The AUEOM noted efforts made by ELECAM to conduct civic education activities in order to reach out to eligible voters. These initiatives were, however, inadequate to effectively deliver voter education to the electorates before the elections due to operational and security challenges.

21. The AUEOM further noted concerns by some stakeholders regarding limited civic education activities on the content and reach of voter information and sensitization, particularly as it relates to the collection of voters' cards and ensuring the voting rights of IDPs.

### **J. Civil Society**

22. The AUEOM noted the weak mobilization of civil society in the electoral process especially due to operational challenges such as funding. The AUEOM noted concerns by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) on the administrative challenges faced on acquiring accreditation, which impacted on their capacity to monitor the elections.

### **K. Election Day Observation**

23. The deployment of the AUEOM observers took into consideration the security situation in the country. The Mission deployed 33 observers to 7 regions of the country with exception of North West, South West and Far North Regions. These regions affected by insecurity were monitored from neighbouring regions by the AUEOM observers. The team of observers visited a total of 176 polling stations.

24. The atmosphere on polling day was generally peaceful except some divisions in South West and North West regions. In its assessment of the voting procedures, the AUEOM noted that the stipulated procedures for opening, voting, closing and counting were mostly complied with. Copies of the voters' register was posted outside most polling stations visited to enable the voters locate their correct polling station.

25. The Mission noted that there were unclaimed voters' cards in most of the stations visited. Out of 2229 unclaimed cards, 157 were collected on the polling day in stations visited. The AUEOM noted inconsistencies with polling procedures in some polling stations where polling personnel assisted voters. Polling procedures require that the voter should request for assistance from a person of his/her choice provided that the said person is a registered voter in the polling station.

26. The AUEOM noted that there was some confusion in certain polling stations regarding the ballot for Akere Muna, the candidate of Popular Front for Development, following his withdrawal from the presidential contest on 5 October 2018. In a number of cases, the ballot paper of the candidate was issued to voters despite his withdrawal, while in other cases, voters were not issued with the candidate's ballot paper. The AUEOM noted the clarification made by ELECAM which alluded to a lacuna in the legal framework on the timeframe for withdrawal of candidates before the election day.

27. The AUEOM commends the ELECAM for ensuring accessibility of voters to the polling stations including PWDs. It further observed that priority were granted to PWDs including expectant women and the elderly. Security personnel were present in stations visited and ensured maintenance of law and order.

28. Despite challenges experienced in accreditation of CSOs, the AUEOM noted their presence in most stations visited. This enabled them to play a role in contributing to the transparency of the polling process.

29. In most polling stations visited the AUEOM noted an average of 4 polling staff. Most parties were not represented amongst the polling personnel. In addition, it was observed that in all the polling stations visited, only 25.5% were female.

## **L. Recommendations**

Based on the preliminary findings, the AUEOM makes the following recommendations.

### **30. To all political and electoral stakeholders:**

- Engage in an-all-inclusive political dialogue aimed at promoting political, legal and electoral reforms in order to consolidate democracy, governance, peace and stability.

### **31. To Parliament:**

- Consider strengthening the legal framework for elections through:
  - Strengthening ELECAM as an independent election management body through reforming its mode of appointment and mandate which should include, among others, accreditation of election observers and results management and announcement of provisional results;
  - Reducing the minimum voting age from 20 to 18 years based on the principle of universal suffrage in order to promote the participation of youths in the electoral process;
  - Adopting single as opposed to multiple ballot system in order to minimize the cost and administration of elections; and
  - Elaborating the procedures in the legal framework such as withdrawal of candidates from an electoral contest including timeframe; and enfranchisement of IDPs

### **32. To ELECAM:**

- Explore the possibility of reviewing the process of registration of voters in order to ensure on-the-spot issuance of voter cards; and
- Consider institutionalising a permanent consultative forum for sustainable engagement with political parties and other stakeholders in order to ensure inclusive participation throughout the electoral cycle;
- Review the procedures for recruitment, training and deployment of polling personnel to ensure the selection process is under the direct control of ELECAM.

## **M. Conclusion**

### **33. The AUEOM:**

- Expresses its gratitude to the people of Cameroon for their hospitality;
- Appreciates the cooperation of Cameroonian authorities and ELECAM in facilitating the deployment of the Mission;

- Notes that the 7 October 2018 Presidential elections was conducted in a context of operational, security and political challenges;
- Deplores violence which occurred in certain areas;
- Encourages all stakeholders to engage in an inclusive political dialogue and pursue political and electoral reforms in order to promote sustainable democracy, governance and political stability.

As the electoral process is still ongoing, the AUEOM urges the different stakeholders to exercise restraint and respect the existing legal framework.