



**AFRICAN UNION (AU) AND THE COMMON MARKET FOR EASTERN AND SOUTHERN
AFRICA (COMESA) JOINT ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION TO THE 14 - 16 JULY 2024
GENERAL ELECTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF RWANDA**

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

KIGALI, 17 JULY 2024

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Republic of Rwanda held its general elections from 14 to 16 July 2024 to elect a President and Members of the Chamber of Deputies.
2. The Chairperson of the African Union Commission (AUC), H.E Moussa Faki Mahamat and the Secretary General of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), H.E Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, deployed a joint African Union-Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa Election Observation Mission (AU-COMESA EOM) led by His Excellency Jorge Carlos De Almeida Fonseca, Former President of Cabo Verde and Right Hon. Ruhakana Rugunda Former Prime Minister of the Republic of Uganda and a Member of the COMESA Committee of Elders. The Mission leadership was supported by H.E Bankole Adeoye, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (CPAPS). The joint Mission comprised of 48 Short-Term Observers (STOs). The observers were drawn from African Ambassadors accredited to the African Union (AU), the Pan African Parliament (PAP), Election Management Bodies (EMBs), Independent Electoral and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) from 16 African countries which include Benin, Cabo Verde, Comoros, Egypt, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Libya, Malawi, Mauritius, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. It was supported by the technical team from the African Union Commission, COMESA Secretariat, the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) and two independent electoral experts.
3. The Mission was charged with the responsibility of observing and reporting on the preparation and conduct of the electoral process in line with the relevant international instruments for democratic elections including: the African Charter on Democracy Elections and Governance (ACDEG), COMESA Guidelines on the Conduct of COMESA Election Observer Missions; and the legal framework for elections in Rwanda.
4. Nineteen (19) teams of observers were deployed in pairs to the five (5) regions and 19 districts to observe the final phases of the electoral campaigns, election days and limited post-election activities. The Mission also engaged with key electoral stakeholders including the National Electoral Commission of Rwanda (NEC), Representatives of Government, Ministries Departments and Agencies (MDAs), Political Parties, Civil Society Organisations, Members of the African Diplomatic Corps, The United Nations (UN) and The European Union (EU), with a view to better understand the political, institutional and social context relating to the elections.
5. Through this Preliminary Statement, the Mission offers a summary of its key findings, conclusions and recommendations on the electoral process up to the closing and counting of the polls. This statement is issued while the collation of election results is still ongoing. The Mission will continue to closely follow the electoral process and provide a final report 30 days from the date of announcement of final results.

II. CONTEXT AND PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

6. The 14 to 16 July 2024 elections were the fourth since Rwanda's adoption of 2003 Constitution.
7. The Mission noted that the Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda (as amended in 2023) provides for the President to be elected based on a single national constituency, requiring a simple majority and elected for a term of five-years that is renewable once. The

amendment also provides for the harmonisation of the presidential and legislative elections starting from the 2024 election.

8. There are eleven registered Political Parties. Among them, nine are in a coalition with the Rwanda Patriotic Front to contest the presidential election. The other party contesting the presidency and not in coalition is the Democratic Green Party of Rwanda.
9. The Supreme Court upheld the NEC decision to approve three presidential candidates. The approved candidates include Paul Kagame - The incumbent president and candidate from the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF); Frank Habineza - Leader of the Democratic Green Party of Rwanda and Philippe Mpayimana - an independent candidate.
10. The Mission noted that preparations, including the submission and approval of candidates, campaign activities, and updating of voter register, were implemented as scheduled.

III. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

12. The 2024 elections were conducted based on the 2003 Constitution (as amended in 2023), and subsequent electoral laws that emphasise proportional representation to ensure diverse political participation. Of note, Article 52 of the Constitution provides for a “multi-party system of government” for political organisations fulfilling the conditions required by the law, establishing their right to operate freely. Organic Law No. 001/2023 of 29/11/2023 of the National Electoral Commission regulating the 2024 Presidential Elections as amended by Instruction No. 29/07/2019 and Regulation No. 03/2018 of 09/07/2018 Governing Parliamentary Elections.
13. The National Electoral Commission (NEC) was created in 1993 and reaffirmed by Article 180 of the Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda. The current NEC is composed of seven (7) Commissioners of whom six are women.
14. According to article 99 of the 2003 Constitution (as amended in 2023), any native Rwandan, who is not a dual national, is at least thirty-five years old and has full civil and political rights can stand as a candidate for the presidency.

IV. ELECTORAL SYSTEM

15. The President is elected in one round of voting by plurality. Rwanda has a bicameral parliamentary system consisting of the 80 seats in the Chamber of Deputies (Lower Chamber) and the Senate (Upper Chamber) comprising of 26 members, appointed and elected for an eight-year term. The 53 of 80 seats of the Chamber of Deputies are elected through closed party lists and independent candidates in a single nationwide constituency with an electoral threshold of 5%, while the 27 remaining are elected through electoral colleges. These include 24 reserved for women (six from Eastern, Southern and Western province, 4 from the Northern province and 2 from Kigali), two for representatives of youth and one for a representative of the Persons with Disabilities (PwDs).

V. ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATION AND PREPAREDNESS

16. Various key Institutions are involved in the administration of the elections. These are the National Electoral Commission (NEC), Rwanda Media Commission, the Supreme Court and other authorities including, the Ministries of Local Government, Gender and Family Promotion, Youth, Finance and Economic Planning, and Foreign Affairs.
17. The NEC is an independent Constitutional Commission responsible for preparing and organising free and fair local, legislative, presidential and referendum or such other elections.
18. The NEC set up 2,442 polling stations across the country and 158 polling stations in diaspora (70 countries). NEC recruited and trained 100 000 youth volunteers as polling assistants.
19. The NEC used colour coded ballot papers and different booths for the presidential and legislative elections in polling sites.
20. The Mission noted the use of technology particularly the Rwanda Election Management Information System for verification of registration details, updating identification and transferring to a different polling station via phones or laptops.
21. The NEC's engagement with the Rwanda National Youth Council and Civil Society Organisations to conduct targeted educational campaigns, raise political awareness and encourage active participation among the youth is notable.

VI. VOTER REGISTRATION

22. The Mission noted that NEC in collaboration with the National Identification Agency of Rwanda (NIDA), compiled the voter register for all Rwandans aged 18 years and above. The registered voters could update and change their voting location through the online platform and USSD codes.
23. 9.7 million voters were registered including 77,138 diaspora voters. The Mission commends the NEC for providing comprehensive disaggregated voter register data indicating 53% female, 47% male and 42% youth voters.

VII. ELECTION CAMPAIGNS AND MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

24. The Mission noted that campaigns were conducted for three weeks from 22 June to 13 July 2024 and were generally peaceful. All candidates were granted an equal opportunity to campaign. The mission observed some of the final rallies.
25. The Mission observed that media played a key role in disseminating information aimed at promoting meaningful participation during elections. Both public and private media outlets enjoyed the relative confidence and trust of stakeholders during the electoral period.
26. The Rwanda Media Commission trained journalists and monitored access to media to ensure equal coverage and professional conduct.

VIII. INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION

27. The Mission took note of the efforts to encourage participation in the electoral process through civic and voter education including giving priority to the elderly, PWDs, and others.
28. The Mission noted the contribution of various institutions and actors including NEC and the National Consultative Forum of Political Organisations (NFPO) to promote political dialogue and voter education with special initiatives to enhance women and youth participation.
29. The Mission observed that the Constitution mandates political parties to have 30% women representation in addition to the electoral college for women, youth and PWDs. Despite this enabling legal framework, the Mission noted that there were no female presidential candidates.

IX. SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

30. The adequate deployment of security personnel to ensure a safe, secure and peaceful environment for the conduct of the election was noted.

X. ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND ELECTION OBSERVERS

31. The Mission acknowledges the role civil society played in civic and voter education. They deployed domestic observers under the Rwanda Civil Society Platform umbrella.

XI. ELECTION DAY OBSERVATION

32. The Mission deployed to all the five regions in Rwanda and observed opening and closing procedures in 19 polling stations and visited a total of 202 polling units to observe voting.

Opening of polling

33. All polling stations visited opened on time and election materials were available in sufficient quantities throughout the day. All polling stations were laid out appropriately to guarantee secrecy of the vote.
34. Polling staff demonstrated adequate knowledge of the procedures and displayed a high level of professionalism. The Mission noted that 67% of staff in the polling stations visited were female.

Voting process

35. The observers noted that voting remained peaceful and orderly and proceeded uninterrupted throughout the day, even where there were long queues.

36. All authorised stakeholders including political parties and candidates' agents and observers, were present in majority of the stations visited and were allowed to conduct their duties without restrictions.
37. The Mission, however, noted that the majority of political party agents in pollings stations were from the ruling coalition.
38. While most of the polling units were generally accessible to voters, in 15% of the units visited, there were difficulties in accessibility for those facing mobility challenges. This is partly because of the nature of the country which made it inevitable to situate some polling stations within a mountainous terrain.
39. The Mission observed that priority was given to PwDs, the elderly, expectant and nursing mothers.
40. The electoral regulations provide for voters needing assistance to be assisted by a person of their choice who is 14 years old but has not attained 18 years.
41. All polling stations visited had sufficient security personnel whose conduct was professional and non-obstructive.
42. While the processing time for each voter to cast their ballot was low, the mission noted that in some polling stations, the one volunteer assigned to each process was at times overwhelmed.

Closing and counting of the polls

43. Majority of the polling stations closed on time at 15:00h. The Mission, however, observed very long queues in several polling stations at the time of closing. The Mission further observed that all voters in the queue at the closing time were allowed to cast their vote.
44. Closing and counting took place in a peaceful, open and transparent atmosphere in the presence of some observers, party agents and media. Polling staff were generally competent in carrying out their duties and demonstrated a sense of commitment to the process.
45. Counting procedures were adhered to in line with the legal framework.

XII. COMMENDABLE PRACTICES

The Mission noted commendable practices during this electoral process including:

46. Polling staff taking a public oath to adhere to the code of conduct before opening of the polling station.
47. Deployment of youth volunteers as part of the polling staff and use of existing infrastructure including furniture in setting up polling stations reduced the cost of the election. Volunteerism as polling assistants demonstrates a spirit of civic responsibility and patriotism.
48. The calm and orderly culture of celebrating elections and voting as a patriotic duty through associating the process with national colors, culture and music to promote tolerance and cohesion.

49. Use of public address systems to provide voter education at the polling stations.
50. Use of technology to facilitate both participation and enhance efficiency in the process.
51. The constitutional provisions that majority party cannot have more than 50% of Cabinet positions or occupy the position of Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies to ensure power is shared among the electoral competitors.
52. Reserved quotas and dedicated election by a special electoral colleges for women, youth and PwDs to enhance inclusion in political participation and representation.
53. Rwanda is among the few countries in Africa which self-financed (100%) its elections.
54. Setting up polling stations in hospitals and peacekeeping missions abroad to allow broader participation.

XIII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

55. The 2024 general elections consolidated Rwanda's democracy and provided an opportunity to test the constitutional and electoral reforms introduced since the last election.
56. The Mission acknowledges measures put in place to allow for voting for election officials and essential workers including security that were on duty during the polling day.
57. The Mission acknowledges the efficiency in the announcement of the results within the confines of the law.
58. The Mission also appreciates the timeline of 15 days provided by the law for the Supreme Court to make ruling on electoral petitions.
59. The Mission commends the NEC for deploying women and youth as polling officials.
60. On inclusion, the Mission commends the participation of persons with disabilities in general elections which remains a significant focus for both government and advocacy groups.
61. Cognisant that the electoral system and the governance structure is informed by the country's history, the Mission offers the following preliminary recommendations for consideration by various stakeholders:

To the National Electoral Commission (NEC)

- Continue to build the capacity and raise awareness of polling staff on the role of observers.
- Consider providing election related information readily online in all the official languages.
- Review deployment and assignment of volunteers in polling stations to consider ways of further expediting the voting process.

- Explore ways to support and encourage improved participation of election observers and political party agents in polling stations.

To the Government

- Enhance affirmative action in the electoral system for people with disabilities and youth.
- Continue to prioritise inclusive dialogue to enhance inclusion in the electoral and political system.

To Civil Society Organisations

- Continue engagement with NEC, the National Council of Persons with Disabilities (NCPD) and National Youth Council to encourage more participation of youth and PwDs.

As the country awaits the announcement of final results by the NEC, the Mission encourages all stakeholders to maintain their adherence to democratic principles and the rule of law until the process is completed. Furthermore, the Mission urges for any aggrieved party to pursue recourse through legally established channels.