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## ELECTORAL COMMISSIONS FORUM OF SADC COUNTRIES

### THE OBSERVATION STATEMENT SUBMITTED TO THE National Electoral Commission of Angola

#### INTRODUCTION

The Electoral Commissions Forum (ECF) of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries was invited by the Angola National Electoral Commission through a letter dated 5<sup>th</sup> July 2008 to observe the 2008 Legislative Elections scheduled for the 5<sup>th</sup> of September 2008 in Angola. In response to this invitation, the ECF duly deployed a 16 member Observer Mission.

The Mission hereby presents this statement on its observations, a full report of which will be availed at a later stage.

#### ABOUT THE ECF-SADC

This is an autonomous body of 14 electoral commissions in the SADC region which cooperate and support each other on electoral matters. The Forum is governed by a constitution that seeks to promote:

- conditions conducive to free, fair and transparent elections, and
- through the electoral process, democracy as a political system of responsible and accountable government.

More importantly, the major rationale behind the ECF observing elections in the SADC region is to enhance and consolidate the capacity of election management bodies in the administration of elections.

#### MISSION COMPOSITION

The Electoral Commissions represented in the ECF-SADC Observer Mission were from the following countries:

- the Democratic Republic of Congo,
- Mozambique,
- Namibia,
- the Republic of South Africa, and
- the Republic of Zimbabwe.

Most delegates arrived in Luanda on the 26<sup>th</sup> of August 2008. Dr Isekiel Molde Gusse, a Commissioner of the National Electoral Commission of Mozambique was the Mission Leader, deputized by Mrs Joyce Laetitia Kazembe, the Deputy Chairperson of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission.

## **MISSION ACTIVITIES**

First, it is imperative to mention that the ECF-SADC was unable to meet with the CNE Angola before the elections, despite many initiatives by the Mission Secretariat to have a consultative engagement, as is the usual practice. This was unfortunate, for, the Mission was unable to establish from the host Commission its level of preparedness to conduct the elections. With this background, the Mission did not have adequate and or confirmed information on key issues that are of major concern to the ECF, specifically matters relating to political parties' registration, voter education, voter registration and generally any challenges that the CNE Angola might have faced during its preparation for the National Legislative Assembly elections. Nonetheless, the Mission did receive the relevant documents from the CNE covering the legislative framework.

The above notwithstanding, the Mission organised a seminar to which a number of stakeholders were invited to make presentations on the following:

- (a) The level of impartiality of both the public and private media in the coverage of contesting political parties and candidates;
- (b) Perspective of contesting political parties on the elections and the attendant political and economic environment ; and
- (c) Views and perspectives of Civil Society and Non-governmental Organisations on socio-economic issues and the forthcoming elections generally.

The Mission also had a consultative meeting with the SADC Observer Mission to share notes on the context in which the elections would be conducted.. The ECF-SADC Observer Mission appreciates the magnanimity of the SADC Mission in affording it with very useful materials.

## **PRE-ELECTION PERIOD BRIEFINGS**

Through interactions with the above stakeholders, the Mission noted the following:

- A lot of effort was made by the relevant authorities to facilitate the holding of peaceful elections.
- There were no reports of violence or intimidation of voters in the period leading to the elections.
- Some stakeholders indicated that there was a gratifying level of tolerance displayed by Angolans, which behaviour further enhanced a conducive environment for the holding of credible elections.
- Almost all stakeholders applauded the public media for an equitable coverage of contesting parties.
- There was free and unhindered campaigning by contesting parties.
- There was an un-restricted number of both local and international observers.
- Also, contrary to complaints raised by some quarters, there was no deliberate effort by relevant authorities to make things difficult for contesting parties to operate.
- However, some stakeholders felt that voter education was inadequate, given the level of (il)literacy of the Angolan population..
- Lastly, there was also a feeling that the interaction between the National Electoral Commission and stakeholders was inadequate.

## **DEPLOYMENT**

The Mission was deployed in four of the eighteen provinces, namely, Bengo, Cuanza Norte, Cunza Sul and Luanda which was covered by two teams. Because of logistical challenges, the Mission accomplished only two pre-poll provincial visits to Bengo and around Luanda to familiarize itself with

the location and geographical terrain of the said provinces, and also to assess the level of preparedness on the part of the CNE-Angola.

## **OBSERVATIONS**

The Mission observed the following:

- The public media covered equitably the political campaigns by contesting political parties.
- The public media complied with the principle of affording contesting political parties equal airtime to enable them articulate their policies and manifestoes to the public.
- Political party activists and campaigners were free to put on political party regalia without fear or intimidation.
- Judging by the processions of jubilant convoys of people in all modes of transportation, and from the public media reports, turn out at political rallies was high and unhindered.
- However, accreditation of international observers was a rather lengthy process which impacted negatively on the Mission's planned pre-election plans.

### **With regard to polling day, the Mission observed that:**

- The opening of polling stations procedures were followed according to the electoral law and attendant regulations.
- On average, 3 political party agents were represented in most of the polling stations.
- Foreign observers and local observers had free access to polling stations and their presence was courteously noted by the respective presidents of the polling stations.
- There were generally adequate election materials in most polling stations except in some pockets in Luanda where ballot papers ran out or were not delivered at all. However, it is gratifying to note that the CNE extended voting in Luanda by an extra day to cater for those voters that had not had the opportunity to exercise their franchise on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September 2008 for reasons mentioned above.
- The lay-out within the polling stations was generally satisfactory.
- Every voter produced and used her/his voter registration card which was properly recorded before s/he received and cast her/his vote.
- Once voting commenced at a polling station, the voting process was smooth and fast.
- The PDAs found at some polling stations facilitated checking of individual voter registration related information.
- Following from the points immediately above, polling staff were adequately trained to handle the elections.
- The Mission commends the CNE for the high participation of youth and young adults as polling officers; this denotes a vibrant future in the management of elections in Angola.
- While the Police were not within the polling station, they were within reach should their services be required.
- The closing of poll and counting procedures were conducted in accordance with the electoral law.
- The Mission noted the immense desire by the Angolan electorate to cast their vote by their high turn out.
- In spite of this high turn out, there were very few spoilt or blank papers, implying a good voter education exercise by the CNE and its stakeholders.

## Concluding Remarks

On the basis of the fore-going, the Electoral Commissions Forum of the SADC countries commends and congratulates the CNE-Angola for implementing such an efficient, transparent and credible electoral process. The Angolan people must be congratulated for freely exercising their right to vote in a peaceful manner and in a conducive environment.

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*Hon. Commissioner Isequiel Gusse*  
*Mission Leader*

8<sup>th</sup> September 2008, Luanda, Angola

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**Forum Presidency:** Rev A. Malumalu - President (DRC), Justice A. Msosa -Vice President (Malawi)  
**EXCO: Chairperson:** Justice I. Mambilima (Zambia), - **Vice Chairperson:** Chief S.G Dlamini (Swaziland), Justice A.C.P.C. de Sousa (Angola) Justice S. Gaongalelwe (Botswana) Mr A Rahman (Mauritius) M.K. Mwinyichande ( Zanzibar) Justice G. Chiweshe ( Zimbabwe)