C/O IEC –Botswana
7th Floor- Block 8
Government Enclave
P/Bag 00284
Gaborone, Botswana

Tel (+267) 3180012
(+267) 3612400
Fax (+267) 3180016
(+267) 3905205
URL- www.sadc-ecf.org

ELECTORAL COMMISSIONS FORUM OF SADC COUNTRIES

THE OBSERVATION STATEMENT SUBMITTED TO THE INDEPENDENT ELECTORAL COMMISSION OF BOTSWANA

INTRODUCTION

The Electoral Commissions Forum (ECF) of the SADC countries received an invitation letter from the Independent Electoral Commission of Botswana dated 8th September 2009 to observe the Botswana General Elections to be held on the 16th October 2009 in the Republic of Botswana.

In response to this invitation, the ECF duly deployed to Botswana a 26 Member Observer Mission.

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

The ECF Mandate

The ECF, comprising all 14 SADC member states' Electoral Commissions, was launched in July 1998 and is governed by a Constitution. Among its various functions and activities, the ECF's mandate includes the following:

- To strengthen co-operation amongst Electoral Commissions in the SADC region;
- To promote conditions conducive to free, fair and transparent elections in the SADC region;

The ECF views election observation as an important component of promoting democratic elections and consolidating democracy in the SADC Region. The rationale behind the Forum observing elections, therefore, is to assist fellow Election Management Bodies identify areas needing improvement in elections administration

Forum Presidency: Rev A. Malumalu - President (DRC), Justice A. Msosa -Vice President (Malawi)
EXCO: Chairperson: Justice F. Mumba (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)

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Mission Composition and Structure

The Electoral Commissions represented in the Observer Mission were Democratic Republic of Congo , Lesotho ,Malawi ,Namibia , South Africa,, Swaziland ,Zambia and Zimbabwe , with the first delegates arriving in Gaborone on the 7th October 2009. *(See Annex for list of Mission Members.)*

The Mission was led by Mrs Limakatso Mokhothu , Chairperson of the Independent Electoral Commission of Lesotho.

Pre-Poll Mission activities

The Mission met with the following stakeholders:

(a) The IEC-Botswana which provided the Mission with a comprehensive brief on their preparedness and readiness to conduct the election;

(b) Political parties representatives, media institutions, civil society organizations and Non Governmental Organizations who briefed the Mission on how the preparations regarding elections were conducted. The stakeholders generally expressed satisfaction on the level of their involvement at all stages of the electoral process. The seminar with stakeholders proved very informative in understanding the various perspectives on the 2009 elections.

(c) The African Union which organized a meeting for Heads of Missions and facilitated notes sharing by the missions.

The Mission also arranged the following visits:

- to the IEC-Botswana Head Office to appreciate the functions of the key departments especially the Information Technology, Voter Education and Broadcasting sections.
- to the new IEC-Botswana office which is currently unoccupied.
- to the IEC-Botswana warehouse where election materials were checked and dispatched to the various constituencies.
- Observation of political rallies by contesting political parties.

Deployment

The Mission divided itself into seven teams to cover twenty of the fifty-seven constituencies of Botswana.

All the teams managed to make pre-poll visits in their assigned Constituencies to familiarize themselves with the location of the Polling Stations and to observe pre- election activities.

Overview on the Poll

The Mission observed the following on polling day:

- Most polling stations opened on time.
- Voting went smoothly but was painfully slow in most polling stations.
- The voting stations were adequately staffed with officers who appeared trained.

- Polling staff had difficulties using the voters roll and this slowed the voting process
- The voters were able to cast their ballots without difficulty.
- The secrecy of the ballot was safe guarded.
- In most voting stations visited observers were present when voting started at 630 am.
- Party Agents were present in the voting stations visited.
- The signage regarding polling stations was visibly displayed and not available in some polling stations.
- The police were visibly present at the polling stations to provide security.
- The conduct of the elections was orderly and peaceful.
- There was a high turn-out of voters at some polling stations.
- The elderly voters were given first preference at some polling stations.
- There was public media coverage of the polling day.
- The verification process was slow and this delayed counting.

In relation to the above observations, the Mission recommends the following to the Independent Electoral Commission:

- Transparent ballot boxes should be used, as it is a general practice in the SADC region
- That there should be consistency and standard practice in polling procedures at all polling stations.
- That the voters roll be arranged alphabetically or numerically to facilitate the voting process
- Depending on the number of registered voters, the Commission could increase the number of voting streams to reduce waiting time for the voter.
- Consideration of a national election results centre.
- Consideration to count at polling stations rather than at selected counting centres.
- Introduction of an electronic logistical data base or an improved system at the ware house.
- Deployment of polling officials in constituencies where they are registered to vote.
- Use of photos in the accreditation of observers for easy identification.

Conclusion

The Mission observed that generally the preparations for the conduct of elections were in place and this assisted the people of Botswana to exercise their Constitutional Right to vote.

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Limakatso Mokhothu
Mission Leader
Electoral Commission Forum of SADC countries

18th October 2009, Gaborone, Botswana.

Annexure A: List of ECF-SADC Delegates

Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC Countries Observer Mission to Botswana– 2009				
Name	Designation	Institution	Country	Contact details
Marie Rose Kambere Kavira	3rd Deputy Rapporteur	**Independent Electoral Commission**	**DRC**	**Tel: +243 812400888** **Cell:+243 813053901** **Fax:** **Email: topkavir@yaaho.fr**
Pascal Rukengwa	Commissioner	**Independent Electoral Commission**	**DRC**	**Tel: +243 812400001** **Cell: +243 899346143** **Fax:** **Email: rukengwa@gmail.com**
Limakatso Mokhothu	Chairperson	**Independent Electoral Commission**	**Lesotho**	**Tel: +266 22314991** **Cell: +266 58883734** **Fax: +266** **Email: mokhothu@iec.org.ls**
Malefa Mosala	Human Resource Manager	**Independent Electoral Commission**	**Lesotho**	**Tel: +266 22314991** **Cell: +266 58864614** **Fax:** **Email: mosala@iec.org.ls**
Chababane Letsitsi	District Electoral Assistant	**Independent Electoral Commission**	**Lesotho**	**Tel: +266 22461293** **Cell: +266 58049059** **Fax: +266 22461006** **Email: letsitsi@iec.org.ls**
Mathabiso Sehloho	**Executive Secretary: CEO's office**	**Independent Electoral Commission**	**Lesotho**	**Tel: +266 22314991** **Cell:+266 58430164** **Fax: +264** **Email: sehlooho@iec.org.ls**
Professor Brown B. Chimphamba	Commissioner	**Electoral Commission**	**Malawi**	**Tel : +265 888686758** **Cell : +265 1775504** **Email : bchimphamba@aol.com**
King Norman Rudi	**Acting Snr Electoral Services Officer**	**Electoral Commission**	**Malawi**	**Tel : +265 1823224** **Cell : +265 888872197** **Email : krudi@mec.org.mw**
Z. Klazen	Control Officer: Office of the CEO	**Electoral Commission**	**Namibia**	**Tel : +264 61 376224** **Fax : +264 61 237618** **Cell : +264 811291472** **Email : zklazen@ecn.na; zklazen@opm.gov.na**

Terry Tselane	**Commissioner**	**Independent Electoral Commission**	**South Africa**	**Tel : +27 12 428 5700** **Fax :** **Cell : +264 83 459 2803** **Email : tselanet@elections.org.za**
Julia Moroka	**Logistics Officer**	**Independent Electoral Commission**	**South Africa**	**Tel : +27 12 428 5849** **Fax : +27** **Cell : +27 83 294 5812** **Email : morokaj@elections.org.za**
Kate Bapela	**Chief Public Relations Officer**	**Independent Electoral Commission**	**South Africa**	**Tel : +27 12 428 5700** **Email : bapelak@elections.org.za**
Mzwandile R. Fakudze	Deputy Chairman	**Elections & Boundaries Commission**	**Swaziland**	**Tel: +268 4162507** **Cell: +268 6063504** **Fax:** **Email: fakudzemz@gov.sz**
Dumsani Cuthbert Khumalo	**Principal Elections Officer**	**Elections & Boundaries Commission**	**Swaziland**	**Tel: +268 4165404** **Cell: +268 6179260** **Fax:** **Email:**
Grace M. Mulapesi	Commissioner	**Electoral Commission**	**Zambia**	**Tel: +260 01 254007** **Cell: +260 0977 749988** **Fax:** **Email:** **grace.mulapesi@elections.org.zm**
Stanley Mathotho	Commission Secretary	**Electoral Commission**	**Zambia**	**Cell: +260 977857466** **Cell: +260 9558177** **TelFax: +260251612** **Email:** **stanley.mathotho@electcom.org.za**
Janet Siame	Principal Electoral Officer	**Electoral Commission**	**Zambia**	**Cell: +260 977877485** **Cell: 360 955958003** **Tel/fax: +260255067** **Email:** **janet.siamze@elect.com.org.zm**
Vivian S. Ncube	Commissioner	**Electoral Commission**	**Zimbabwe**	**Tel: +263 11874899** **Cell: + 263 9242231** **Fax : +263** **Email :**
P. Mapondera	Director IT	**Electoral Commission**	**Zimbabwe**	**Te l : +263 4703315** **Ce ll : +263 913 945117** **Fax :** **Email :** **maponderapamela@yahoo.com**

D. Chidakuza	Commission Secretary	**Electoral Commission**	**Zimbabwe**	**Tel : +263 (4) 770066** **Cell : +263 11878608** **Fax : +263** **Email :** **domchidakuza@yahoo.co.uk**
J. Nyathi	Provincial Elections Officer	**Electoral Commission**	**Zimbabwe**	**Tel : +263 0284 23315** **Cell : +263 0912704609** **Fax : +263** **Email :**
B. Marozva	Executive Assistant	**Electoral Commission**	**Zimbabwe**	**Tel : +263 (4) 703374** **Cell : +263 023432273** **Fax : +263** **Email :** **marozvablessing@ymail.com**
H. Modisane	**Programme Officer**	**ECF Secretariat**	**Botswana**	**Tel: +267 318 0012** **Email: hmodisane@gov.bw**
L. Sesa	**Admin Officer**	**ECF Secretariat**	**Botswana**	**Tel: +267 318 0012** **Email: lsesa@gov.bw**