

Coalition of Domestic Election Observers

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT ON GHANA'S PRESIDENTIAL AND PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS HELD ON SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7 2008; ISSUED AT A PRESS CONFERENCE AT THE KOFI ANNAN INTERNATIONAL PEACEKEEPING TRAINING CENTER ON MONDAY, DECEMBER 8 2008 AT 2:00PM

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Introduction

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Media,

On Sunday, December 7, 2008, the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) observed the Presidential and Parliamentary general elections held throughout Ghana by deploying approximately 4000 persons across the country. It includes 230 persons with disability drawn from the Ghana Federation of the Disabled (GFD). We have invited you here this afternoon to share with you our preliminary statement on the conduct of the 2008 elections. CODEO issued a mid-day situational and end of voting statements about the polling yesterday. While this preliminary statement is a more detailed one, it also reflects some of the initial findings as contained in those earlier statements.

This statement is based primarily on the reports filed by CODEO Rapid Response Observers (RROs). Reports have been received from 99% of the 1070 RROs from all 10 regions and all 230 constituencies. The RROs were deployed to a nationally representative sample of polling stations in all the 230 constituencies. Observation reports and incident reports filed by CODEO Regular Observers (ROs), the Regional Coordinators (RCs) as well as the Constituency Observers (CSs) are also factored into this report. As promised, a detailed analysis of CODEO observations and recommendations will be released in a final report a month's time. CODEO will also be releasing more detailed information on the findings of its parallel vote tabulation (PVT) after the announcement of the official results by the Electoral Commission (EC).

The Coalition is made up of thirty-four (34) civil society organizations, professional and some religious organizations. CODEO observed the polls as independent and non-partisan observers.

The main objectives of CODEO for this exercise were as follows:

- Promote free, fair, transparent and peaceful elections;
- Instill confidence among the Ghanaian public at large in the electoral process and in the building of democratic structures;
- Work to deter, prevent and /or detect electoral fraud;
- Lend legitimacy and credibility to the 2008 electoral outcome; and
- Encourage citizens' participation in Election 2008.

Summary of Observations

CODEO is of the view that, so far, the 2008 presidential and parliamentary elections have been conducted in accordance with electoral laws of Ghana and also met the international standards of election. The pre-election environment was relatively transparent, even and competitive, in spite of several challenges recorded. The election-day polling was conducted in a credible, open and peaceful manner. Ghanaians responded to the election in an enthusiastic and responsible way that demonstrated their commitment to work towards the sustenance of our democratic governance.

Pre-Election Observation

In the statement issued on the eve of election (Saturday, December 6, 2008), CODEO stated its position on its eight month-long observation of the pre-election environment. In that statement CODEO acknowledged a number of challenges observed during the period, such as the unsatisfactory management of the 'Limited Voter Registration'; sporadic violence in some parts of the country; inadequate civic and voter education; and perceptions of weak or partisan policing and selective prosecution of offenders, among others.

CODEO also noted with commendation the relative evenness of the political playing field, especially in terms of media coverage of the election campaigning; the competitive nature of campaigning; the openness and the dialogue that existed between the political parties and the Electoral Commission (EC); and the general comportment of the political parties and their candidates during the period including focusing on policy issues during the campaigning.

While CODEO regrets the challenges encountered during the period, mostly as a result of actions or omissions of the political parties and the EC, the Coalition affirms the overall transparency of the electoral process prior to election day.

Election Day Observation

On election day, CODEO observed the opening and set-up of polling stations; the actual voting; and the counting and collation of results.

Opening and Set-up

The set-up of polling stations and opening of polls encountered relatively few problems. About a third of the polling stations did not open on time. At some polling stations some election materials were missing during set up.

- CODEO observers reported that majority of the polling stations (74%) opened on time. In a third of the polling stations that opened late, the Upper East region suffered the most. Some of these polling stations opened two to three hours after official voting had started.
- In almost all the polling stations (99%) that CODEO deployed, our observers were permitted to observe. Sixteen of our observers who were not allowed at the opening were later permitted to observe.
- In a vast majority of the polling stations (99%), party agents were present during set-up. The NDC and the NPP agents were the most visible. Party agents of the CPP were also present in more than half (59%) of the polling stations. All the other presidential candidates were able to field agents at some polling stations.
- At the time of opening and setting-up, most of the polling stations (close to 88%) had uniformed security presence. There was a high presence of security in regions identified as swing (Central, Greater Accra), volatile (Upper East) and strong-holds (Ashanti and Volta) of the two main political parties (the NPP and the NDC).
- Nearly all polling stations (98%) were set up so that voters could mark their ballots in secret; were accessible to persons with disability and the elderly (95% of polling stations); and also ballot boxes were shown to be empty, then sealed and placed in public view (99%) to ensure transparency.
- At the set-up, majority of polling stations (95%) were reported having all of the materials. Of the few polling stations (0.5%) which recorded missing election materials such as indelible ink, validating stamp, endorsing ink, and ink pads were the most affect. Our observers noted that these items were replenished and voting progressed steadily thereafter.

Voting Process

Reports filed by CODEO observers have generally suggested the following:

- Voting process was orderly and EC officials to a large extent enforced the voting rules and regulations;

- Ninety-three percent said voters had their little finger duly marked with the indelible ink before they cast their ballot;
- Similarly, 92% indicated that ballot papers were duly stamped before voters cast their votes.
- Twenty-seven percent reported that there were voters in queues waiting to cast their ballot at 5:00pm when voting officially ended. However, nearly all observers (98%) said all eligible voters in queues at 5:00pm were allowed to vote.

Voting Irregularities and Incidents

As indicated in our close of polls press statement, the vast majority of CODEO observers did not report any major problems during the voting. This notwithstanding, CODEO observers reported seven cases of suspension of voting in some polling stations in the Western, Eastern, and Northern Regions. A typical case is the Akwatia constituency where our observer reported that voting was suspended due to a clash between supporters of the NDC and NPP, which resulted in the snatching of seven ballot boxes. Checks at the Electoral Commission indicate that six of the ballot boxes have so far been retrieved.

Other incidents of which CODEO is presently aware includes the following:

- 40 cases of missing electoral materials at the time of set-up;
- 6 cases of disorder at polling stations;
- 5 cases of violation of voting procedure;
- 8 cases of violence, intimidation and harassment
- 3 cases of electoral officials turning away of eligible voters; and
- 3 cases of ineligible voters being permitted to vote.

For instance, it is reported that a group of young men seized and destroyed a ballot box for Akrabon, Central Region, polling station because they disagreed with the results. They assaulted the presiding officer as well.

CODEO is informed by its constituency supervisor for Afram Plains in the Eastern region that voting began at five polling stations on the morning of December 8 in the Dwarf Islands in the Afram Plains. According to him, the EC's Presiding Officer could not get to the area on time yesterday as a result of transportation problems. Besides, the helicopter conveying electoral materials also arrived late.

Counting of and Collation of Votes

- In the vast majority of the polling stations (92%), political party agents did not challenge the results. Indeed, 95% signed the declared results at the polling station.
- CODEO has received reports of the vote count from nearly all the 1070 polling stations (98%) for the presidential elections. Therefore we are in a position to project the likely outcome of the presidential race. However, as CODEO stated in its election eve press conference, it will refrain from making any statement on the ballot count until the EC has officially declared the results. CODEO may be compelled to pre-empt the EC declaration of election results if the EC's self-imposed 72-hour deadline expires without any tangible explanations.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings above CODEO is in a position to conclude that, in spite of the difficulties encountered in the pre-election period and on election day (including the minor voting irregularities, overall), the conduct of the 2008 elections up to the end of voting and counting of votes has generally been peaceful, free, fair and transparent.

Over all, CODEO acknowledges the transparent and peaceful manner in which the voting process has taken place on December 7. Eligible Ghanaians were able to cast their votes in an orderly manner and in accordance with national and international standards of voting.

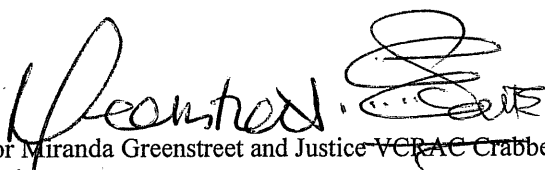
CODEO commends the EC for its general preparedness and the professionalism of the polling officials in the discharge of their duties. While, many Ghanaians may have been skeptical of the ability of the EC to conduct the 2008 general elections due to some of the pre-election challenges mentioned earlier, CODEO is of the view that, so far, the EC has performed creditably in the conduct of the polls.

We commend voters for coming out in their large numbers to cast their ballot. We also commend the political parties, the security services, the media, civil society and all other stakeholders in their overall comportment in this election which has, so far, been considered as successful and peaceful.

CODEO appeals to all Ghanaians to remain calm as the EC completes the tabulation of the results. We also urge all political parties not to create unnecessary tension by prematurely claiming victory. CODEO hopes that the transparent manner that has characterized this election season involving the political parties and the EC will continue and the true reflection of the will of Ghanaians will be acknowledged at the appropriate time.

CODEO will continue to observe the process of presidential vote tabulation and where appropriate a statement will be issued.

Finally, CODEO recommends that the security services do not relent in their efforts to protect the citizenry and promote the peace in the post-election period.

Signed: 
Professor Miranda Greenstreet and Justice Verac Crabbe,
Joint Chairpersons
(For and on Behalf of the Advisory Board)
CODEO Secretariat, Monday, December 8 2008