



**ACCRA COMMUNIQUÉ
of the
COLLOQUIUM ON AFRICAN ELECTIONS**

November 14, 2009

Leaders from election management bodies, political parties, security services, civil society and media from 25 sub-Saharan countries gathered in Accra, Ghana from November 12-14, 2009 to assess recent elections across the continent and develop recommendations for raising standards of professionalism, improving electoral processes and mitigating election-related conflict.

In many African countries, successful elections have strengthened democratic institutions and practices while enhancing opportunities for economic growth. In others, credible elections have paved the way for national reconciliation and return to civilian rule after periods of armed conflict and civil war. At the same time, flawed elections in some African countries have sparked violence, further polarized divided societies and eroded public confidence in political and electoral processes.

During the Accra colloquium, participants reviewed the successes and challenges of recent elections on the continent. Deliberations on best practices and lessons learned from elections in Africa reinforced the importance of cross-sectoral collaboration, effective communication and trust among all election stakeholders as essential ingredients for successful elections. Participants engaged in comparative discussions on the design and structure of election management bodies and conflict mitigation mechanisms – such as inter-party dialogue platforms, multi-party liaison committees, and cross-sectoral codes of conduct – and their enforcement provisions. In assessing best practices, participants identified the following prerequisites for peaceful, participative and credible elections: inclusiveness, transparency, integrity, professionalism and accountability.

Participants recognized the need for a holistic approach to elections that includes coordination among election management bodies, political parties, security services, civil society, religious leaders, and the media. Participants acknowledged the growing demand across the continent for strengthening democratic institutions and practices, and noted existing political will to advocate for credible elections, even if electoral processes in many countries fall short of citizens' expectations.

Participants considered the importance of the African Union's Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, adopted in 2007. Article 17 of the Charter "reaffirms the commitment to holding transparent, free and fair elections in accordance with the 2002 OAU/AU Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Election in Africa," and calls on states to take concrete actions to fulfill their responsibilities. Article 22 of the

Charter commits governments to “create a conducive environment for independent and impartial election monitoring or observation mechanisms.”

Participants agreed on the need for African governments to ratify expeditiously the AU charter and other relevant instruments, and for civil society to promote and monitor compliance and issue scorecards or other reports on the implementation of their provisions.

Participants acknowledged the positive actions of regional organizations, such as the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in adopting protocols aimed at fostering democratic governance and high standards of electoral conduct. Participants noted with concern, however, that implementation of these standards varies widely among the member states.

In recognition of the variety of experiences and lessons learned across the continent, as well as the acknowledgement of the universality of democratic values, frank and practical discussions during the colloquium on the state of elections in Africa led to the following recommendations:

To African governments:

1. Ratify the African Union Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance and relevant regional instruments, and put into place mechanisms to monitor and enforce compliance with its principles.
2. Ensure that constitutional, legal and regulatory frameworks that reflect international best practices, to include continuous voter registration, are in place in a timely fashion. These frameworks should not be unilaterally modified.
3. Take steps to fully fund elections through budget allocations as a matter of national sovereignty.
4. Set up credible election management bodies with leaders and members chosen on the basis of their integrity, professionalism and ability to act independently.
5. Release funding for election management bodies early in the process, and respect the independence of these bodies.
6. Create an integrated and impartial electoral security coordinating body, bringing together all security services and other national stakeholders such as representatives of political parties, civil society and media that play a role during electoral processes in order to facilitate coherent, professional and effective policing around elections.
7. Provide an enabling environment in which domestic election monitoring organizations and international observer groups can freely observe and comment on all aspects of the electoral process.
8. Encourage free, responsible and robust media as a means of promoting democratic elections and good governance by:
 - a. Establishing regulatory frameworks that promote media pluralism and encourage responsible journalism, both in ownership and points of view,

- and that sanction media that incite violence and conflict or the derailment of the democratic process.
 - b. Removing the application of criminal liability to election campaign and candidate coverage.
 - c. Ensuring that all political parties have equal access to publicly financed media.
9. Put in place appropriate mechanisms for the expeditious, just and fair resolution of electoral disputes.
 10. Prosecute election-related offenses in a timely, just and fair manner.

To Election Management Bodies:

1. Allocate appropriate time and resources to critical aspects of the electoral process such as election planning, budget planning, staff selection and capacity building, the voter registration process, the candidate selection process, data management, polling agent recruitment and training, voter and civic education and compliance mechanisms.
2. Develop capacity to facilitate citizen access to voter registration processes on a continuous basis or as required by national law.
3. Conduct operations transparently.
4. Ensure fair treatment of all political contestants and citizens through regular outreach towards political parties, civil society, domestic monitoring organizations and international observers, media and security services.
5. Avail themselves to political party and candidate agents, domestic election monitors and observers, media and international observers interested in monitoring the electoral process.
6. Ensure that accurate information on the electoral process is regularly provided to the public on a timely basis.
7. Ensure the accessibility of the electoral process to marginalized groups, including the disabled, youth and women.
8. Work with all other stakeholders to ensure peaceful and credible elections.
9. Expeditiously and transparently count, tabulate and announce election results.

To Political Parties:

1. Level the playing field to ensure credible, democratic and peaceful elections by advocating for the reform of electoral and regulatory frameworks, where necessary.
2. Actively promote and participate in multi-stakeholder, as well as inter-party and intra-party dialogue platforms to ensure transparent and inclusive party processes that can contribute to peaceful and credible electoral processes.
3. Commit to peaceful actions at all times, especially during electoral periods, sign and enforce codes of conduct, and educate party leaders and activists to honor their provisions.
4. Inspect voter rolls during display periods and utilize lawful means to seek redress in case of gaps and omissions.

5. Refrain from campaign strategies and messages that appeal to ethnic or regional differences.
6. Focus on issue-based policy and platform development and ensure wide dissemination of these documents to the public.
7. Commit to take part in candidate or party debates and lobby for the widest possible media coverage to enable voters to make informed electoral choices.
8. Practice internal democracy, especially in the conduct of candidate selection and nomination processes.
9. Ensure that party agents are appropriately selected, trained and monitored during electoral periods.
10. Stipulate in party constitutions and other internal regulations provisions for the inclusion of women and marginalized groups in leadership roles within their respective parties.
11. Continuously recruit and educate members, including women, youth and representatives of other marginalized groups.
12. Prepare women and youth for positions of leadership within party structures and as candidates for elected office.
13. Openly accept the results of credible and democratic elections.
14. Refrain from shielding from appropriate and fair legal action party members or supporters who engage in election offenses.

To Security Services:

1. Recognize that electoral security is part of the larger human security framework and, accordingly, ensure that priority during elections is placed on protecting civilians during elections.
2. Fulfill institutional responsibilities to ensure the impartiality of security services in the conduct of their official missions during the entire electoral process.
3. Actively participate in national, sub-national and local-level electoral coordinating bodies in order to maximize intra-government cooperation and coordination during and between electoral processes.
4. Define the roles of the respective security services in providing electoral security with the preference that the police play the lead role in an integrated effort that can draw upon support from the military, if needed.
5. Conduct electoral threat assessments and prepare security plans in advance of election day in order to ensure that training has been conducted, communication networks are in place and response capacity has been tested.
6. Maintain high standards of professionalism during all phases of the electoral process.

To Civil Society:

1. Carry out civic and voter education campaigns through all phases of the electoral process.
2. Develop understanding of constitutional, legal and electoral frameworks in order to advocate for electoral reform, as needed.

3. Advocate for the ratification of election laws that reinforce peaceful and credible electoral processes.
4. Promote election dialogue platforms and carry out conflict mitigation initiatives.
5. Promote the participation of women and youth in all stages of the electoral process.
6. Organize and host candidate debates in coordination with media, political parties and candidates.

To Domestic and International Election Monitoring and Observer Groups:

1. Adhere to regional and international standards and principles guiding election monitoring. Select monitors and observers on the basis of competence and impartiality. Enforce codes of conduct for all election observers and monitors.
2. Observe and report on all aspects of the electoral process, including factors that affect the overall political environment.
3. Conduct activities in an impartial and transparent manner.
4. Create partnerships and coordinate efforts, to the fullest extent possible, among groups and within coalitions.
5. Work with other stakeholders to ensure peaceful and credible elections.
6. Recruit domestic election monitors from community-based organizations.
7. Create regional networks, such as the SADC Electoral Support Network (SADC-ESN), to share best practices and lessons learned.
8. Use new technologies and methodologies, such as statistically based random sampling or parallel vote tabulation (PVT), to enhance the quality of observation efforts.
9. Ensure that international observers are familiar with local laws, customs and culture.

To the Media:

1. State-owned and/or state-controlled media must subscribe to and enforce codes of conduct prohibiting biased news or other coverage, and must guarantee accurate, fair and equitable coverage of electoral contestants.
2. State-owned and/or state-controlled media must provide equitable and free access for all electoral contestants across their distribution channels.
3. State-owned media should serve as public media, and protocols, bylaws and codes of conduct should be adopted to ensure that this public resource operates free of political bias and for the public interest including in the electoral contest.
4. State-owned and state-controlled media must provide robust voter education to ensure citizens understand voter registration and polling day procedures.
5. The recent and growing phenomena of community-based radio, which often broadcasts in local languages and targets rural populations, should be fully integrated into national voter education and election monitoring initiatives.
6. Private media should adopt and enforce codes of conduct, ethical standards and professional guidelines requiring unbiased, accurate and equitable news coverage

- of political parties and electoral candidates. Coverage of political parties or candidate activities that favor one political party or candidate over another must be clearly separated from news coverage and labeled as editorial opinion.
7. State-owned, state-controlled and private media must train journalists and media personnel within their establishments to cover elections accurately, effectively and professionally.
 8. The media's role in monitoring all aspects of the electoral process should be continuous and ongoing throughout the election cycle.

Conclusion:

Participants from the different sectors represented at the colloquium will endeavor to apply these principles in their respective countries and will establish mechanisms to continue sharing ideas and experiences.

Participants call on existing bodies, such as the African Union and its Peer Review Mechanism, to play a more robust role in sharing best practices and lessons learned across the continent in the critical domain of democracy and good governance.

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