

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

2021 Presidential Election Mid-Day Statement

December 4th, 2021

The Elections Watch Committee (EWC) is a partnership of 3 organizations and network members with different expertise and background collaborating to observe the 2021 Presidential Elections in the Gambia. The EWC includes the Peace Ambassadors - The Gambia (PAG), ACTIVISTA and the National Youth Parliament (NYP). This Committee is the decision-making body on all matters relating to the 2021 Elections Watch Project; PAG serves as the Secretariat of the Committee.

Introduction

This mid-day update is based on reports that the Elections Watch Committee (EWC) has received from 300 out of 300 stationary observers deployed to polling streams proportionally nationwide as of 1:00pm on December 4, 2021.

On December 4th, the EWC deployed 460 trained and accredited observers. This includes 160 mobile observers and 300 stationary observers. The 300 stationary observers have been systematically deployed based on a proportional distribution by constituency. This means that the proportion of polling streams observed by the EWC in each constituency and region closely matches the overall percentage of polling streams in each constituency and region. This proportional deployment enables the EWC to comment on the process nationally, drawing on data points from every constituency across the country. In addition, the EWC will deploy observers to the collation centres to observe these processes. Appendix A provides a breakdown of the distribution of observed polling streams by administrative area.

This report focuses on the set-up and opening of polling stations and streams. Percentages reported reflect percentages of polling streams observed which provides credible data on emerging national trends. At this time, the EWC has received 100% of reports from its 300 stationary observers.

Arrival at Polling Streams

- By 7:00am, 100% of Elections Watch Observers were at their assigned polling streams. In all polling streams where Elections Watch observers are located, the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) staff respected the Elections Watch Observer's status as an accredited observer and permitted them to observe at the polling stream.

Set-up

- Elections Watch Observers reported that 98% of polling streams had at least 3 staff during set-up. 96% of polling streams had at least one staff member that was a woman.
- Observers reported that all essential materials (including the voters list, ballot drums, ballot drum seals, ballot tokens, and indelible ink) were available at all observed

polling streams at the time of opening which reflects the good logistical preparation of IEC ahead of election day.

- In polling streams where Elections Watch observed, the ballot drums were shown to be empty and the ballot drums were sealed in a systematic manner.
- Observers reported that in 31% of polling streams the Presiding Officer did not count the number of ballot tokens at the polling stream before opening the process for voting. The Elections Watch Committee notes that the IEC Handbook advises Polling Officials to count the ballot tokens after they receive their materials, which occurs the day before the election. Though counting the ballot tokens at the polling station is not required, doing so in the future would increase the transparency of the voting process.
- Elections Watch observers in 20% of polling streams noted that they had to climb stairs to reach the polling stream. Stairs make the polling place inaccessible to persons with disabilities and the elderly which may disenfranchise them from voting.
- In all polling streams where Elections Watch Observers are located, observers saw security personnel stationed.
- 99% of observed polling streams had at least one party agent present during the set-up process; 70% of polling streams observed had at least four parties present which demonstrates parties' interest and engagement in observing the voting process.

Opening Time

- Elections Watch Observers reported that voting generally commenced on time in most of the observed polling stations. By 8:15am, 93% of polling streams where Elections Watch Observers were assigned had opened. The remaining polling streams opened shortly thereafter, and all observed polling streams were open by 10:00am.

Critical Incidents

Generally, Elections Watch Observer reports indicate that the set-up and opening process has been peaceful, orderly, and proceeding smoothly across the country. The Elections Watch Committee recorded no serious critical incidents during the opening and set-up process. The EWC did receive some reports of arguments occurring over disorderly queuing or who should be given priority to vote; these incidents were quickly resolved. The EWC did receive a report of a security official slapping a voter who demanded to be allowed to be given priority because he was ill. The EWC is reporting this incident to the appropriate authorities.

Recommendations

- Political party agents to continue monitoring the process through closing and counting
- EWC encourages voters who are still waiting in line to vote to wait patiently and in an orderly manner to exercise their franchise. All voters in the line at 5:00pm should be allowed to vote.
- The Security Command should ensure that their officers remain vigilant and continue to protect all voters and officials on election duty throughout the remainder of the process.

About the Elections Watch Committee

The Elections Watch Committee is a partnership of 3 organizations and other network members with different expertise and background collaborating to observe the 2021 Presidential Elections in the Gambia. The Elections Watch Committee includes the Peace Ambassadors-The Gambia (PAG), ACTIVISTA and the National Youth Parliament (NYP). This Committee is the decision-making body on all matters relating to the 2021 Elections Watch Project. PAG serves as the Secretariat of the Committee. The Elections Watch Project is being financed with assistance from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and technical support from the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI).

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Appendix A: Distribution of Elections Watch Observers

| Administrative Area | Distribution of IEC polling streams/stations | | Distribution of Elections Watch Stationary Observers | |
|---------------------|--|----------------------|--|-------------------|
| | # of polling streams | % of polling streams | # of EW observers | % of EW observers |
| Banjul | 36 | 2.3% | 7 | 2.3% |
| Basse | 198 | 12.7% | 37 | 12.3% |
| Brikama | 533 | 34.3% | 103 | 34.3% |
| Janjanbureh | 212 | 13.6% | 43 | 14.3% |
| Kanifing | 276 | 17.7% | 53 | 17.7% |
| Kerewan | 196 | 12.6% | 38 | 12.7% |
| Mansakonko | 103 | 6.6% | 19 | 6.3% |
| Total | 1554 | 100% | 300 | 100% |