

2024 PAKISTAN GENERAL ELECTIONS
ARRIVAL STATEMENT BY
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CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMONWEALTH OBSERVER GROUP
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ISLAMABAD, PAKISTAN

2024 is a big year for democracy. More than 60 countries, home to two billion people, will hold elections, with voters taking to the polls to have their say in how their countries are run.

Thirty-three percent of those voters will be in the Commonwealth, including the roughly 128 million Pakistanis who have the right to cast their ballots next Thursday.

Like all elections, it is an important one - important to Pakistan and the region, and important to the Commonwealth and the wider world. The outcome of this election will have a significant impact on citizens' lives, both today and in years to come. The significance cannot be understated.

It is therefore my honour and privilege to have been asked by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, The Rt Honourable Patricia Scotland KC, to lead the Commonwealth Observer Group to Pakistan's General Elections 2024, and to be here in the country for this election.

I am grateful to be joined by thirteen experts selected from across the Commonwealth. They bring together a diversity of experience, in the fields of elections, law, civil society, politics, human rights, and the media, amongst others.

This eminent Group was deployed by the Secretary-General, following an invitation from the Election Commission of Pakistan.

The Group's presence reaffirms the Commonwealth's solidarity with Pakistan and its democratic processes.

The Group is now assembled in Islamabad and will soon commence their stakeholder briefings.

Our mandate, as set out in the Commonwealth's 'Revised Guidelines' for election observation, is to observe and evaluate the pre-election environment, polling day activities and the post-election period. We will consider whether conditions exist for a credible, transparent, and inclusive election, including whether there is a level playing field for candidates; whether public media has been impartial; whether the administration of the electoral process has been transparent; and whether the rule of law has been adhered to.

Following the election, our Group will issue a report. The report will assess whether the election was conducted in accordance with the standards to which Pakistan has committed itself, including whether the election was conducted in accordance with its own laws and regulations, and the degree to which this legal framework aligns with the country's regional and international commitments. It will also consider whether the administration of the election is in keeping with international good practice.

The report will make a number of recommendations on various aspects of the electoral process. Importantly, in the post-election period, the Commonwealth Secretariat will, upon receiving formal requests from national stakeholders, seek to provide assistance on the implementation of some of these recommendations.

In accordance with the provisions of the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, to which the Commonwealth Secretariat is a signatory organisation, the Group has no executive role; its function is not to supervise but to observe the process as a whole and to give recommendations accordingly. In conducting our duties and undertaking our assessment, we will be neutral, impartial, objective, and independent.

Over the coming days we will be meeting numerous stakeholders, including the Election Commission of Pakistan, political parties, the police, civil society groups, citizen observer and monitor groups, and the media.

From 6 February, we will deploy our observers in small teams to each of the provinces to observe electoral preparations and meet with local stakeholders in their respective locations.

On Election Day, our Group will observe the opening, voting, closing, counting and the results management processes, we will then issue an interim statement on our preliminary findings on 10 February 2024.

The first draft of our report will be prepared in-country, with the final report submitted to the Commonwealth Secretary-General shortly thereafter. It will then be shared with relevant stakeholders and the public.

On behalf of the Commonwealth Observer Group, I urge all stakeholders to ensure the election is held in a peaceful manner, and I thank you for allowing us to be a part of this process, as voters cast their ballots on Thursday.

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