



**Interim Statement by
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Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group (COG)
Trinidad and Tobago
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The people of Trinidad and Tobago, Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, the media, fellow observers, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Thank you for honouring our invitation to this Commonwealth Observer Group (COG) Press Conference.

The Commonwealth is honoured to have been invited to observe Trinidad and Tobago 2025 Parliamentary Elections. Following an invitation from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Hon Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey constituted our Group to observe the 13th Trinidad and Tobago Parliamentary Elections. We note that this election also marks 100 years since the first election was held in this country.

We arrived on 19 April 2025 and will depart on 5 May 2025. As Chair, I am honoured to lead a Group of eminent persons drawn from across the Commonwealth. They are diplomats, and experts in elections management, law, civil society, inclusion as well as the media. The Group is independent of the Secretariat.

Our role is to offer an independent, informed, and impartial assessment of the electoral process, in accordance with the country's laws, taking into account all factors which may impact on the overall credibility of the election.

I now have the privilege to present our preliminary findings which are based on our engagement with a cross section of stakeholders, and our observations since our arrival in Trinidad and Tobago.

Our final report with key recommendations will be submitted to the Secretary-General and shared with the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC), political parties as well as other key stakeholders, and to the wider public.

Let me begin with the pre-election environment.

PRE-ELECTION ENVIRONMENT

For a contextual understanding and assessment of the pre-election environment, the Group met with the Prime Minister, representatives of political parties, candidates, Elections and Boundaries Commission, the Council for Responsible Political Behaviour (CRPB), media and civil society.

The Group also engaged with the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and was briefed about the Police commitment in ensuring Trinbagonians exercise their right to vote in a peaceful manner.

The Group note that in the lead up to the election, the Elections and Boundaries Commission redrew the boundaries of 16 constituencies and renamed five in accordance with Section 72 of the Constitution. We encourage the EBC to consult widely and to improve the transparency of the process in the future.

Campaign and Media

The Group observed final campaign rallies in Port of Spain and in Tobago. The rallies were peaceful, colourful, and well attended, echoing the true colours of the country's carnival spirit. The fundamental rights of candidates, political parties, and supporters to assemble and campaign appear to have been observed.

The Group notes limited regulatory framework for campaign finance. We reiterate the 2015 Commonwealth Observer Group's statement "that the EBC is reflecting on proposals to regulate registration and campaign financing of political parties." 10 years ago the COG recommended that, "the incoming Parliament, political parties and all relevant stakeholders prioritise this process." This has become more urgent.

The media in Trinidad and Tobago is free across traditional and digital platforms. We commend the media, including radio, TV, and print, for providing coverage of the elections and related issues. However, concerns were raised about the disproportionate coverage of the governing party by the state media. We recommend legislation to enforce equitable access for all candidates and political parties.

The Group noted that political parties and independent candidates have leveraged social media platforms to share their manifestos without the cost that comes with traditional media.

We recommend that all political parties adhere to the Code of Political Conduct which does “not permit the use and abuse of state resources for political campaigns.”

Deployment

Our teams were deployed to four regions across the country including: Port of Spain and EastWest corridor; San Fernando and North South corridor; Eastern Trinidad and Tobago. In these locations, we observed the pre-election preparations and engaged with district election officials, and police, to gain a deeper appreciation of the electoral process and the pre-election environment.

Special Voting

We observed special voting which was held from 21st to 27th April 2025. Trinidad and Tobago is to be commended for this initiative, which allows security agencies, prisoners, offshore oil workers and those performing election duty to exercise their franchise. The Group notes reports of longer-than-usual wait times observed at some special voting locations and urges continuous review to improve the process.

ELECTION DAY

Signage

The Group commends the Elections and Boundaries Commission for providing clear and helpful signage in all polling stations to aid the flow and coherence of the voting process. We noticed the presence of information desk officers in each polling divisions, tasked with guiding voters upon arrival to their respective voting stations. This initiative is commendable.

Conduct of the Polls

The polling officials followed pre-poll and opening procedures diligently. Polling stations observed opened on time. We note that voters lists were prominently displayed at polling centres. Voting was conducted in a peaceful environment at polling stations observed. Polling officials must be commended for conducting their duties with professionalism and transparency.

Political Party Agents

Political party agents were present at most polling stations observed by the Group, and they conducted themselves professionally. The level of cooperation among political party agents is commendable.

Presence of Security

We noted the presence of police at most polling stations observed and they were unobtrusive.

Participation and Inclusion

In polling stations observed we note commendable participation of men and women as voters. A high proportion of polling officials and party agents were women. However, the Group noted the lack of disaggregated data on women and youth participation in the electoral process, and this would be recommended for future election.

We observed that Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) and the elderly were given priority at some polling stations. We note and commend the partnership between the Elections and Boundaries Commission and the Consortium of Organization of Persons with Disabilities (CODO) in developing Guidance Template enhancing assistive voting for persons with disabilities.

The Group heard from various stakeholders it met that there is a need to build youth confidence and participation in democratic and electoral institutions and processes, this might have contributed to the low voter interest as compared to previous elections.

The Group recommends that measures be considered to promote greater civic participation in the electoral process, by engaging with civil society groups and allowing continuous voter education and awareness raising.

Election observation

We interacted with the CARICOM Observer mission and noted the absence of citizens-based election observation activities. The Group encourages the Government and key electoral stakeholders to consider mechanisms that strengthen civil society participation in electoral processes, including as citizen observers.

Close and Count

There were no queues at the close of polls at 6:00 pm, at most polling stations observed. While we noted some inconsistencies in the administration of the counting process, however, we observed that polling officials followed closing and counting procedures in a transparent and professional manner.

Conclusion and Post-Election Period

We applaud the people of Trinidad and Tobago for turning out in an orderly manner to exercise their franchise. We commend the Elections and Boundaries Commission, polling staff, political parties, police, and the media for their respective roles in ensuring the successful conduct of the elections.

We note the short period within which the EBC had to conduct this election and the commitment demonstrated by the officials within a highly contested environment. We urge EBC to strengthen its engagement with all stakeholders including civil society to improve the electoral process. We also urge the state to make adequate resources and support available to enable it to discharge its constitutional duty.

The people of Trinidad and Tobago have once again demonstrated patience and commitment to democracy. We will provide recommendations on how the electoral processes might be further improved in our final report which will be made public.

The Group encourages the conduct of a post-election review and consideration for the establishment of appropriate domestic mechanisms to review all recommendations proposed by observer missions.

I want to take this opportunity to once again, thank the people of Trinidad and Tobago for the warm hospitality accorded to myself and the Group during our entire stay and the access offered for our observation processes.

I thank you once again.

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Port of Spain*