

Summary of Conclusions and Observations

We formed our Conclusions and Observations while examining most aspects of the election process during the Guyana General and Regional Elections in accordance with our terms of reference, which state among other things that the Group 'would ... be free to propose to the authorities concerned such action on institutional, procedural and other matters as would assist the holding of such elections.'

Conclusions

Up until the closing of the poll the following conditions existed for the people of Guyana to freely express their will:

- the good sense of the Guyanese people – in addition to the appeal by the Elections Commission, party leaders and the leaders of the various religious bodies – contributed to a peaceful election on polling day;
- the high turnout at the polls was an indication of the confidence held by voters in their ability to freely exercise their choice;
- in most parts of Guyana political parties were able to campaign freely without major threat of intimidation or violence;
- the security arrangements for the poll were good;
- the secrecy of the ballot was assured;
- the arrangements for provision of materials and staff for polling stations were adequate;
- with some exceptions, the procedures were well understood and followed;
- election officers were co-operative, helpful and willing to share information;
- whilst there were shortcomings, most were not significant enough to affect the integrity of the electoral process on polling day;
- party agents behaved responsibly and there was a great deal of co-operation between them on polling day, which was an important contribution to the electoral process;
- we hope that the important role in the process played by local observers will be strengthened in the future;
- the presence of international observers was well received by the political parties, the Commission and the voters and, we would like to think, contributed to increased confidence in the electoral process;
- the participation of women at all levels of the electoral process needs special mention and they should be particularly commended for their role as Presiding Officers in many of the polling places;
- the Elections Commission should be congratulated on its preparations for the elections;
- all political parties in general should be commended for their adherence to the Code of Conduct;
- the voters should be congratulated for the orderly and disciplined manner in which they conducted themselves on polling day.

However, there were a number of shortcomings. These included:

- the tallying process was inadequately handled, which contributed to the problems that subsequently arose;
- the procedure at the close of poll was not accurately adhered to: this included failure by many Presiding Officers to sign their return;
- in some cases Presiding Officers posted their results returns in ballot boxes instead of placing them in envelopes to be delivered separately to the Deputy Returning Officer;

- the Elections Commission had no clearly defined mechanism for communicating its decisions on the results to the political parties and the general public;
- the computer database for processing the tallying and the results left much to be desired;
- contrary to clearly prescribed procedures in the manual for election officials, measures were not taken to ensure that the voting of particular communities could not be easily identified.

We believe that these shortcomings contributed to the diminished credibility of the election results that were being announced by the Commission.

Observations

- We hope that the Inter-Party Committee on Constitutional Reform, or its successor committee, will include electoral reform in its work;
- important and earnest consideration should be given to the future role of the Elections Commission: it may be useful to consider the creation of a permanent institution, which might be responsible for the management, organisation and conduct of elections;
- in view of the many difficulties still posed by the Voter Identification Card system, which prevented a number of citizens from voting, further efforts to rectify these should be undertaken;
- the Elections Commission may wish to consider a method for cross matching to ensure that prior to polling day, Voter Identification Cards and registers carry the same names;
- all parties should take greater part in encouraging their supporters to register and collect Voter Identification Cards;
- the Elections Commission should devise a more efficient means of communicating decisions earlier to those areas which are inaccessible or have no telecommunications links;
- a formula should be devised to ensure equitable use of the public media by all political parties;
- improved mechanisms should be developed to speed up the count without loss of fairness and accuracy;
- measures should be put in place and implemented to ensure a secure means of transmission of the results and transfer of ballot boxes to the office of the Elections Commission following the close of poll and count;
- the Elections Commission may wish to reconsider the separate declaration of the results of the Disciplined Forces Poll;
- urgent consideration should be given to ensuring that mechanisms are put in place for transparent and expeditious verification of results.