

Conclusions

In the Introduction to this Report we described the arrangements for our deployment across the country. Seven two-person teams were based in major provincial centres, while our Chairperson roved across the country. During the fortnight that we were in the field we observed all aspects of the electoral process. We witnessed polling at 321 polling booths in some 66 electorates in 18 of the 20 provinces and observed 17 counts. Our sample embraced the coastal provinces, the islands and the highlands, urban and rural areas, peaceful places and those with a reputation for turbulence, the traditional and the modern. We spoke to many people and we visited many places. In short, we achieved as comprehensive a coverage as possible. As a result we believe that our 'core sample' of the election process was a good one.

There will be shortcomings in any election and this general election was no exception. Some of the shortcomings were serious, particularly the inadequacies of the Common Roll. But these were not such as to invalidate the outcome. Overall, we believe that the conditions existed for a free expression of will by the electors and that the result of the election will reflect the wishes of the voters. Candidates were able to campaign freely and vigorously. Their words and activities were reported fairly by a professional, responsible and free media. The election laws were fair, the process was transparent, in most places the polling procedures were implemented properly. Polling officials were diligent, the people participated eagerly and the counting process was good. Strenuous – and largely successful – efforts were made to ensure security for both people and process.

The shortcomings to which we have drawn attention can be addressed and improvements made for the future – and we are confident that they will be. With this and the wider interests of democracy in Papua New Guinea in mind, we have three sets of suggestions:

- **Strengthening the Electoral Commission** – the Commission needs to improve its management and organisation of elections. To be able to do so and to improve its all-round effectiveness, the Electoral Commission in turn needs to be strengthened in two key areas. First, it must have more staff. At headquarters there should be additional professional staff, particularly in logistics and information technology, and there should be an office in each province with more permanent core staff, especially to deal with registration. The Commission must also have full control over all those engaged in election work. Second, it must have more money, both at election time (when transmission of funds must be timely) and throughout the period in between elections, in the form of annual grants. These should ideally come directly from parliamentary appropriations.
- **Improving the electoral process** – in order to ensure that a reliable and accurate Common Roll can be put in place prior to the next general election, and sooner if possible, a more efficient and effective system of registration should be introduced. With this in mind the Electoral Commission might consider the experience of other Commonwealth countries, both in the use of continuous registration and the use of photo Voter ID cards linked to a computerised registration process. In this context we must also emphasise the importance of holding regular censuses. Other matters might usefully be examined, in particular to ensure the secrecy of the ballot at every polling booth, since we observed that in some parts of the country this was not always assured. We were generally impressed with the counting process, but the Commission might consider amending arrangements so that the voting of particular communities cannot be easily identified. Enhanced voter and ongoing civic education activities might be considered by the Commission and NGOs.
- **Strengthening democracy** – we believe that Papua New Guinea should progressively move towards the holding of countrywide one-day elections. Consideration might be given to alternative systems of voting, given the number of candidates contesting elections in Papua New Guinea, and to possible means of strengthening Papua New Guinea's political party system. These might include state funding for the parties, ensuring that an MP who

crosses the floor should resign and fight a by-election, increasing the level of the candidate's deposit and requiring additional evidence of support from candidates at the time of nomination. We believe that an apolitical civil service makes an important contribution to democracy in any country: in the interests of democracy Papua New Guinea's civil service should continue to be strengthened. The separation of legislative and executive powers should be maintained and in the provinces the combination of the two in the same person should be reconsidered.

If the shortcomings observed during these elections, and the wider issues we have highlighted concerning the consolidation of Papua New Guinea's democracy, are to be addressed Papua New Guinea may well need help from its friends. We therefore hope that the Commonwealth will be ready to assist if requested.

It has been an enriching experience to have been able to observe these elections. We were impressed by the commitment of the people to democracy and have no doubt that they want a participatory system with complete accountability of MPs to parliament and to the electorate. We wish Papua New Guinea every success in its endeavours both to consolidate its democracy and to develop the talents of its people and the riches of its land for the next century.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Chief Emeka Anyaoku, for inviting us to participate in this important mission. We are indebted to him for giving us the opportunity to play a small part in the consolidation of Papua New Guinea's vigorous democracy.

The work of our Observer Group benefited from the assistance of many people. We are especially grateful to the Electoral Commissioner, Mr Reuben Kaiulo, and his colleagues at the Electoral Commission Head Office in Port Moresby and the provincial election offices. They went out of their way to assist us in the preparations for our work and, despite the many pressures on them during the general election itself, always tried to find time to help. We also greatly appreciated the assistance extended to us by the Commissioner of the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary, Mr Robert Nenta, his senior officers in the provinces, who were unfailingly helpful and courteous at a time when they were severely stretched, and in particular the officers who escorted us during our deployment. We must also record our thanks to members of the provincial administrations, who provided us with valuable background information and advice.

We received valuable briefings from representatives of the political parties, non-governmental organisations, the media, Commonwealth High Commissioners and a number of individuals. We thank them for guiding us through the complexities of Papua New Guinean politics. Our drivers and the staff of the hotels in which we were accommodated provided us with assistance without which it would have been impossible to undertake this mission.

But most of all, we must thank the people of Papua New Guinea. They received us with great warmth and kindness and we have made many friends. We wish them every success in the development of their democracy for the future.