



# **The Parliamentary Elections in Cameroon**

**17 May 1997**

The Report of the  
Commonwealth Observer Group

**Commonwealth Secretariat**  
*1997*

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Pall Mall  
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**REPORT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OBSERVER GROUP TO THE  
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN CAMEROON**

17 MAY 1997

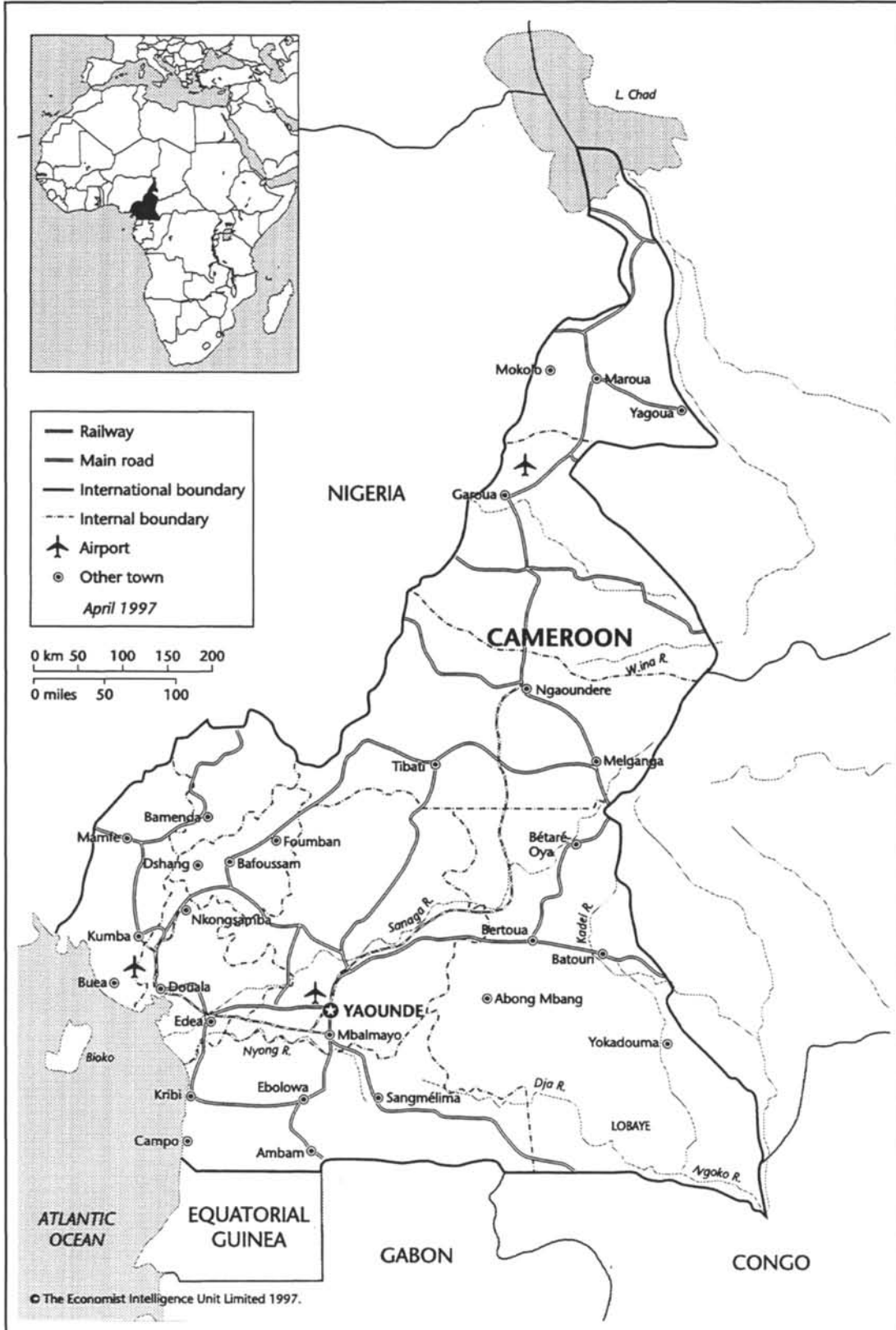
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# Map of Cameroon



## LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL



Cameroon Parliamentary Election, 1997

**Commonwealth Observer Group**

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 Fax: (237) 22 32 10

Hilton Yaoundé  
 Boulevard du 20 Mai  
 BP 11852  
 Yaoundé

22 May 1997

His Excellency Chief Emeka Anyaoku  
 Commonwealth Secretary-General  
 Marlborough House  
 London SW1Y 5HX


Dear Secretary-General

We were pleased to accept your invitation to participate in the Commonwealth Observer Group which was constituted by you to observe Parliamentary elections in Cameroon. We wish to thank you for the opportunity to play a part in helping to consolidate democracy in this country. We now have pleasure in forwarding our Report to you.

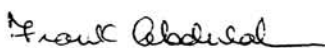
In our Interim Statement issued on 19 May, we stated that our observation of the actual polling substantiated our faith in the commitment of the people of Cameroon to the democratic process. We also expressed a number of concerns which are detailed in our Report. We have made a number of recommendations which will require further action. At the time of our departure, the results of the elections had not yet been announced.

You will note from our report that we have recorded our appreciation to the Government and people of Cameroon for their cooperation and assistance to us during the course of our mission. We believe our presence has set the stage for stronger bonds between the people of Cameroon and the Commonwealth family as a whole.

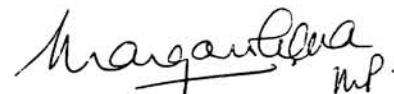
Yours sincerely



Jean-Jacques Blais, PC QC  
 Chairman



Mr Frank Abdulah



Hon Margaret Alva, MP



Mr Charles Chadwick

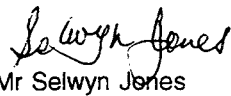
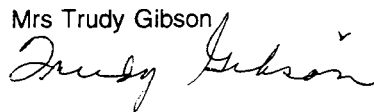


Hon Kenneth Dzirasah, MP



Mrs Charmaine Gardner

Mrs Trudy Gibson



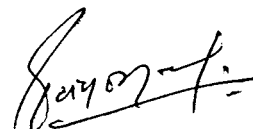
Mr Selwyn Jones



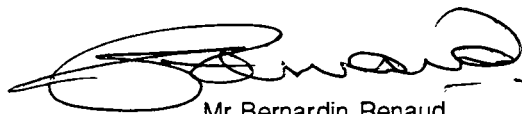
Mr M M Rezaul Karim



Hon Ms Koti Nyama, MP



Hon Daivanaden Poinosawmy



Mr Bernardin Renaud



*The Commonwealth Observer Group at Marlborough House ... (back row from left) Charles Chadwick, Daivanaaden Poinosawmy, Frank Abdulah, (middle row from left) Bernard Renaud, Rezaul Karim, M M A 'Koti' Nyama, Kenneth Dzirasah, Selwyn Jones, (front row from left) Charmaine Gardner, Trudy Gibson, Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General (Political) K Srinivasan, Jean-Jacques Blais (Chairperson), Margaret Abo*

# Introduction

The Parliamentary elections in Cameroon on 17 May 1997 were the first national level elections held in that country since its admission to the Commonwealth in November 1995. These elections formed the first part of a two-phase electoral programme with a presidential election also due to take place later in the year.

The invitation to the Commonwealth to send observers for the parliamentary elections was issued by the Government of Cameroon on 15 April 1997. On 16 April 1997, the Secretary-General wrote to the Government of Cameroon welcoming the invitation and advising them that he would send an Assessment Mission to consult with all the major political parties 'in order to confirm their broad support for a Commonwealth observer presence and to foster a spirit of confidence and co-operation amongst all concerned.' The Mission would also make an initial assessment of the practical arrangements that would need to be made to facilitate the work of the Observers.

Consequently, four officials of the Commonwealth Secretariat visited Cameroon on 20-24 April 1997. They met representatives of major political parties, and other organisations and groups with an interest in the elections. All these supported the proposal that the Commonwealth should send an Observer Group for the parliamentary elections.

The Assessment Mission also held discussions with the Ministry of Territorial Administration (locally known as MINAT), the government body responsible for the administration of the elections, the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of External Relations and the Ministry of Communications.

The context for the Secretary-General's positive response was set by:

- Commonwealth commitment to the promotion of fundamental political values set out in the 1991 Harare Commonwealth Declaration and reinforced by Commonwealth Heads of Government in their Millbrook Commonwealth Action Programme on the Harare Declaration adopted at their meeting in New Zealand in 1995, including 'democracy, democratic processes and institutions which reflect national circumstances, fundamental human rights, the rule of law and just and honest government';
- long-term involvement by the Commonwealth in encouraging and assisting the ongoing democratisation process in Cameroon.

## The Observer Group and its Terms of Reference

It was in this context that the Secretary-General invited our Group of 12 Observers supported by nine staff from the Commonwealth Secretariat, to observe the 1997 parliamentary elections in Cameroon. The composition of the Group, which was led by the Hon Jean-Jacques Blais, a former Cabinet Minister of Canada, is set out at *Annex I*.

The terms of reference for our Group were incorporated in the Secretary-General's letter inviting each of us to participate in the mission and were as follows:

The Group is established by the Commonwealth Secretary-General at the request of the Government of Cameroon and supported by the major political parties. It is to observe relevant aspects of the organisation and conduct of the elections in accordance with the law of Cameroon. It is to consider the various factors impinging on the credibility of the electoral process as a whole and to determine in its own judgment whether the conditions exist for a free expression of will by the electors and if the result of the elections reflects the wishes of the people.

The Group is to act impartially and independently. It has no executive role; its function is not to supervise but to observe the process as a whole and to form a judgment accordingly. It would also be free to propose to the government and other concerned authorities such action on institutional,



*Commonwealth Observer Group Chairperson Jean-Jacques Blais (far right) introduces Commonwealth Secretary-General Chief Emeka Anyaoku to some other members of the Group on arrival at Nsimalen International Airport ... (from left to right) Daivanaden Poinoosawmy, Selwyn Jones and Bernardin Renaud*

procedural and other matters as would assist the holding of the elections and thereafter the effective functioning of the elected government.

The Group is to submit its report to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, who will forward it to the Government of Cameroon, to the leadership of the political parties taking part in the elections and thereafter to all Commonwealth governments.

A press release announcing our mission was issued in London and Yaoundé, the capital of Cameroon, on 7 May 1997 (see *Annex II*).

### **Method of Work**

Our Group assembled in London on Wednesday 7 May 1997 and was briefed by the Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General (Political), Mr K Srinivasan. We left London on Thursday 8 May and arrived in Yaoundé late that evening. On arrival at Nsimalen International Airport, we were fortunate to be able to meet with the Commonwealth Secretary-General who had attended an international conference and held bilateral talks with the Government in Yaoundé in the week prior to our arrival. The following day we issued an Arrival Statement (*Annex III*) at a press conference and began a series of briefings, beginning with a briefing by senior officials of the Ministry of Territorial Administration.

Thereafter, and until our deployment to the various regions of the country on Tuesday 13 May 1997, we met representatives of the main political parties contesting the elections, the

National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) including the Association of Women Jurists (ACAFEJ), the Union of Journalists of Cameroon (UJC) and the Cameroon Bar Association. We were also briefed by Commonwealth diplomats and other members of the diplomatic community, including the European Union. In addition, some members of our Group were briefed by the President of the Supreme Court.

On 13 May 1997, our Chairperson and some members of our Group who had not yet deployed met with the Vice-Prime Minister responsible for Territorial Administration, the Hon Gilbert Andze Tsoungui, to seek clarification of some of the points which had been raised with us during our earlier meetings.

Our Schedule of Engagements is at *Annex IV*.

Our Group was divided into ten teams of two, and on 13 and 14 May 1997, were deployed to all ten provinces in Cameroon. On 14-15 May our Chairperson and the leader of the Secretariat's team, who were based in Yaoundé, travelled to Bamenda in North-West Province to assess at first hand the state of electoral preparedness in that region. While in Bamenda they were briefed by political party officials.

On deployment, our teams met senior representatives of the Administration including Governors, Senior Divisional Officers (SDOs) and Divisional Officers (DOs) responsible for the administration of the elections; regional representatives of political parties; traditional leaders; religious and community leaders, as well as local NGO activists. Wherever possible we liaised with other international observer groups and those local observer groups which had been accredited by the Government. Prior to polling day, all teams travelled extensively throughout their designated regions in order to familiarise themselves with local conditions, assess the state of preparedness for the poll and observe the last days of the campaign. Each team reported regularly to base headquarters in Yaoundé. Details of our deployment and the statement issued by our Chairperson on deployment are at *Annex V*.

On 17 May 1997, our ten teams witnessed the opening of polling stations (scheduled for 8 a.m.) and their closure (scheduled for 6 p.m.) in all provinces of Cameroon. On 18 May our team in the Far North Province observed polling in Maroua Rural – the only region in which polling did not take place on 17 May. The reasons for this are fully explained in Chapter 5.

Throughout the day on 17 May, we visited over 350 polling stations at random, inspecting polling arrangements and consulting with Presiding Officers, electoral officials, party agents and the voters. We also observed the counting of votes at some polling stations that evening. In addition, some teams witnessed the compilation of constituency returns at the level of DOs,



*Just one more thing ... the Commonwealth Observer Group Chairperson has a final word with members of the delegation from the Association of Women Jurists (ACAFEJ) after their briefing session*

SDOs and by Divisional Supervisory Commissions. We were guided throughout our deployment by the Notes on Observation of the Poll and Count and the Check List both of which are reproduced at *Annex VI*.

On 18 May, all teams returned to Yaoundé in order to begin debriefing and commence consideration of our report before departing Cameroon on 22 May.

On the basis of our observations, our Chairperson issued an Interim Statement on 19 May. A copy of this statement appears at *Annex VII*. A Departure Statement was issued on 22 May and appears at *Annex VIII*.

Two members of the Observer Group, supported by two Secretariat staff, remained in Yaoundé after 22 May to observe the continuing process of tallying by the National Commission for the Final Counting of Votes, and the preparations for the official proclamation of results by the Supreme Court. Their report is at *Annex X*.

#### **Co-operation with the *Agence de Coopération Culturelle et Technique* (ACCT)**

Co-operation between the Commonwealth and other international organisations, in particular the *Agence de Coopération Culturelle et Technique* (ACCT), the secretariat of *La Francophonie*, had been planned prior to the arrival of our Observer Group in Yaoundé. In the event, we were pleased to be able to interact closely with the ACCT team, both in Yaoundé and in some of the Provinces to which they deployed. Further co-ordination and meetings between the two groups took place after the observation of the elections and there were valuable exchanges of information.

# Chapter 1

## Political Background

### Recent Political History

Cameroon achieved independence in 1960 and has a republican form of government. HE Mr Paul Biya is the incumbent President and executive Head of State. Cameroon was admitted into membership of the Commonwealth on 1 November 1995 and, along with a number of other Commonwealth member countries, also enjoys membership of *La Francophonie*.

The present political scene has its roots in the partition of the country into French and British Trust Territories with four-fifths of the territory under French administration, and the other one-fifth along the eastern border of Nigeria under British administration as the Northern and Southern Cameroons. In February 1961, a plebiscite held in Southern Cameroons voted in favour of the establishment of a federation with the Republic of Cameroon, while Northern Cameroons chose to join the Northern Region of Nigeria.

The Southern Cameroons thus became the Western State of the new Federal Republic of Cameroon on 1 October 1961. The Premier of the former Southern Cameroons, Dr John Foncha, assumed the vice-presidency of the Republic, the office of President being held by Mr Ahmadou Ahidjo. Both components of the federation retained their local parliaments.

### Moves Towards Unification

After federation, President Ahidjo pushed rapidly and determinedly for complete unification. In 1966, he persuaded most parties to join in the formation of a single national party, the *Union Nationale Camerounaise* (UNC), effectively turning the country into a one-party state. In a referendum held in May 1972, 99.7 per cent of the electorate approved a new constitution providing for a unitary state under a strong executive president. The new constitution came into effect on 2 June 1972.

In April 1975, President Ahidjo was re-elected unopposed as President with more than 99 per cent of the vote. In June that year, Mr Paul Biya, the former Secretary-General in the President's Office, was appointed to the new post of Prime Minister. In November 1982, President Ahidjo transferred power to Mr Biya. This was followed by a period of political instability. A congress was called in March 1985 at which the UNC was renamed *Rassemblement Démocratique du Peuple Camerounais* (in English and hereafter, the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement – CPDM). President Biya stood as the sole candidate in the presidential elections of 1984 and 1988, securing 99 per cent of the votes cast on each occasion.

On 6 December 1990, the National Assembly approved a constitutional amendment providing for the establishment of a multi-party system. Under the revised constitution, the Government was required to grant or refuse registration within three months to any political association seeking legal recognition, and registered parties were to receive state support during election campaigns. The recruitment of party activists on a regional or ethnic basis was, however, prohibited. In 1990, the Government also established the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms under the chairmanship of Dr Solomon Nfor Gwei.

By September 1991, close to 40 political parties had been legalised. The Social Democratic Front (SDF), the *Union Démocratique du Cameroun* (UDC), and the *Mouvement Social pour la Nouvelle Démocratie* (MSND), all emerged with considerable followings and called for the holding of a sovereign national conference.

In October 1991, President Biya announced that the first multi-party parliamentary elections would be held in February 1992. The President also set up a Tripartite Forum in November 1991, with representation from the Government, the opposition and independent personalities, to examine the question of constitutional reform. Some opposition parties declined to participate.

### The 1992 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections

Multi-party legislative elections to a 180-member National Assembly were held on 1 March 1992. In protest that these elections were taking place without any change in the existing constitution, only 32 out of the 70 registered political parties participated. Among those that boycotted the polls was the main opposition party, the SDF.

Four parties shared the seats in the new Assembly: the ruling CPDM won 88; the *Union Nationale pour la Démocratie et le Progrès* (UNDP), a predominantly regional party based in the north of the country, won 68; the *Union des Populations Camerounaises* (UPC), a faction of the party that led the independence movement, obtained 18; and the *Mouvement pour la Défense de la République* (MDR), a regional party from the Far North Province, took six. The ruling party entered into an alliance with the MDR to secure an absolute majority.

In August 1992, President Biya announced that the presidential election scheduled for April 1993, would be brought forward to October 1992. As efforts to agree on a single opposition candidate did not succeed, there were six candidates for the presidency: Mr Paul Biya (CPDM); Mr John Fru Ndi (SDF); Mr Maigari Bello Bouba (UNDP); Mr Adamou Ndam Njoya (UDC); Mr Jean-Jacques Ekindi (*Mouvement Progressif*); and Mr Ema Otou Nze (*Rassemblement des Forces Patriotiques*).

The presidential election held on 11 October 1992, was observed by a team from the National Democratic Institute, USA, and other groups, but the result was dogged by controversy. The Government issued provisional figures (at 25 per cent and 50 per cent of the total votes counted) suggesting a Biya victory with 50 per cent of the ballot. This was challenged by one of the opposition parties. The Supreme Court dismissed the case on technical grounds.

On 21 October, ten days after polling, with the official figures still awaited, Mr Fru Ndi declared himself winner with 38.57 per cent of the vote, with 36.86 per cent for Mr Biya. The official result declared on 23 October gave Mr Biya victory over Mr Fru Ndi by a margin of 39.97 per cent to 35.94 per cent (a difference of under 120,000 votes). There were widespread protests in the two anglophone provinces and, on 27 October 1992, a State of Emergency was declared in the North-West Province. Some of the leaders of the SDF and a large number of its supporters were detained. The State of Emergency was lifted three months later.

### Constitutional Reform, 1992-96

During the 1992 campaign, President Biya had announced his political programme which included: constitutional reform; the establishment of regional governments; a clear separation of powers between the executive, legislature and judiciary; the removal of press censorship; and the creation of a Government of National Unity in which the opposition would be represented.

The opposition's main demand was to hold a national conference on constitutional reform. In March 1993, the Government constituted a Technical Commission to prepare recommendations based on proposals received from all sectors of the community.

The Government had published draft constitutional amendments which provided for a democratic system of government, restricted the powers of the President whose tenure was limited to two five-year terms of office, and proposed that future elections comprise two rounds of voting. The unitary state was to be retained whilst introducing a more decentralised system of government. These proposals were subject to further modification on receipt of the recommendations of the Technical Commission.

The remainder of 1993 and much of 1994 were marked by civil and political unrest. At the end of 1994, President Biya convened a Constitutional Consultative Committee (CCC) to deliberate on constitutional arrangements. The UNDP and the SDF refused to participate as long as the members of the CCC were appointed and not elected; other opposition parties were initially represented, but many of their representatives subsequently withdrew.

The new constitution was unanimously adopted by the National Assembly in December 1995, and promulgated by President Biya in January 1996. Of the 353 amendments proposed by the opposition parties, about 70 were incorporated. The Constitution still allowed for the appointment by the President of the Prime Minister, the Senate, and all 11 members of the

proposed Constitutional Council. The President retained the power to appoint Regional Delegates to preside over elected Regional Assemblies.

Local government elections originally scheduled for 1992 were twice postponed, finally taking place in January 1996. In these elections, the opposition parties took outright control of seven out of ten provincial capitals and a large number of other councils. The Central Government, however, appointed 'Government Delegates' as chief executives of all the major cities.

### **The 1997 Parliamentary Elections**

The 1997 parliamentary elections were held on Saturday 17 May 1997. These elections were seen as critical and were keenly contested by 45 political parties. All 180 seats in the National Assembly were contested, distributed in 58 constituencies in the ten provinces, with a complex mix of single and multiple member constituencies. A 'winner takes all' system applied when any party secured an absolute majority (more than 50 per cent) of the vote in a constituency. However, a mix of the first-past-the-post and proportional representation systems came into play if no party obtained a clear majority.

### **The Major Political Parties**

As stated above, 45 political parties participated in the elections but not all contested seats in all ten provinces. The following are the main political parties:

***The Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM)*** The CPDM was the sole political party during the one-party era. Formed in 1985 from the UNC, it had been the governing party under former President Ahidjo. At the last parliamentary elections in 1992, the CPDM won 88 out of 180 seats in the National Assembly. It then governed in coalition with two smaller parties – the MDR and the UPC.

***The Social Democratic Front (SDF)*** The SDF was the first party to challenge the one-party system and is the largest of the opposition parties. It has strong support in the North-West, West, and the Littoral Provinces. The party boycotted the last parliamentary elections in 1992, but performed well in the January 1996 municipal elections.

***The Union Nationale pour la Démocratie et le Progrès (UNDP)*** The UNDP, with 68 seats, led by Mr Maigari Bello Bouba, a former Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition since 1992, was the largest opposition party in the last parliament. The results of the January 1996 municipal elections indicated that the party's support was concentrated in Adamaua and North Provinces, with some support in the Far North Province.

***Union des Populations Camerounaises (UPC)*** The UPC is the oldest political party in the country. It has now split into two factions, the UPC 'K' and the UPC 'N'. Prior to the split, the UPC won 18 seats in the last parliament.

***Mouvement pour la Défense de la République (MDR)*** This party's support is concentrated in the Far North Province where it won six seats in the last parliament. Since 1992, the MDR had been a coalition partner in government with the CPDM.

***Union Démocratique du Cameroun (UDC)*** The UDC is led by Mr Adamou Ndam Njoya, a former Minister under President Ahidjo. The party's strongest support comes from Mr Njoya's home *departement* of Noun.

## Chapter 2

# The Electoral Framework

### Constitutional Background

The Constitution of the United Republic of Cameroon currently in force is the Constitution of 1972 as amended by Law No. 96-06 of 18 January 1996. It provides that the legislative power shall be exercised by Parliament comprising the National Assembly and the Senate, but the President of the Republic 'enacts' the laws passed by Parliament.

One of the distinctive features of the implementation of the Constitution as amended is that some of the new institutions it envisaged, which have a direct bearing on the elections for the National Assembly, have yet to be put in place. Specifically, a Constitutional Council charged with proclaiming the results of the elections is yet to be established. In the meantime, the Supreme Court is charged with performing the functions of the Constitutional Council.

### The Legal Framework

#### *The Electoral Law*

The law governing election to, and membership of, the National Assembly is contained principally in Law No. 91-020 of December 1991 as modified by Law No. 97-13 of March 1997.

The 1991 law was the outcome of a 'tripartite conference' between the government, political parties and some eminent individuals. To that extent therefore, it was widely acknowledged as having established a broadly acceptable framework for the conduct of elections. On the other hand, the March 1997 amendments did not involve such a broad consensus and have been the source of many complaints by opposition parties.

#### *The Ministry of Territorial Administration (MINAT)*

There is no separate and autonomous body charged with organising and supervising the conduct of elections in Cameroon. The overall responsibility lies with the Vice-Prime Minister who heads the Ministry of Territorial Administration (MINAT). The machinery for the conduct of elections is thus inseparable from the system of territorial administration.

To facilitate day-to-day administration, the country is divided into ten Provinces each of which is further demarcated into Divisions. On 2 April 1997, the same day that the elections were announced, a presidential decree (No. 97-062) increased the number of constituencies to 58 in line with the total number of Divisions and redrew a number of electoral boundaries.

#### *Constituencies and Constituency Boundaries*

In terms of the electoral law, each Division constituted an electoral constituency for the purposes of the parliamentary elections. Each constituency was then allocated one or more of the 180 National Assembly seats on the basis of several criteria, including population density and geographical size. Controversy surrounded the amended electoral law, whereby additional constituencies could be created by presidential decree on the grounds of their 'peculiar situation', a term which was not defined by law; 16 'special constituencies' were created by the 2 April presidential decree.

Opposition parties alleged that the allocation of seats between the constituencies was inequitable and often resulted in the gross under-representation of constituencies where they enjoyed the strongest support.

### ***Electoral Bodies***

The electoral law also creates a series of Commissions charged with responsibility for various aspects of the electoral process. These are summarised as follows:

(a) *Commissions for the revision of the register of electors*

These Commissions exist at the council, sub-division or district levels, and their functions include:

- examining applications for registration and recording in the register the names of citizens who satisfy the age, residence or other requirements prescribed by law;
- deleting from the register the names of those who were disqualified or were not qualified to be registered as electors.

Membership of such a Commission comprises a chairman appointed by the SDO, the Mayor or a municipal representative and a representative of each political party contesting the election in the constituency.

(b) *Commissions charged with supervising the establishment and distribution of registration cards*

The functions of these Commissions, in each sub-division, include the following:

- supervising the production and distribution of registration cards;
- reporting on the distribution of the cards to the Sub-divisional Officer.

The membership of these Commissions is identical to that of the Commissions for the revision of the register of electors.

(c) *Local Polling Commissions*

The membership of these Commissions at polling station level includes a chairman appointed by the SDO, a representative of each candidate or list of candidates and, at the discretion of the Commission, two additional scrutineers. Their functions include:

- opening and closing the polling station under the provisions of the revised electoral law;
- ruling on any difficulty arising during the conduct of the poll;
- maintaining order at the polling station;
- immediately after the close of the poll, checking and counting the votes and proclaiming the results;
- recording the results on a *Procès Verbal* to be signed by all members of the Polling Commission and delivering a copy of the report to the SDO;
- ensuring the public destruction of ballots not subject to controversy after the count.

(d) *Divisional Supervisory Commissions*

These Commissions are in each Division, and have responsibility for:

- examining and adjudicating on all claims and complaints relating to the registration of voters and voters' cards;
- centralising and checking the operation of the local polling commissions, as conveyed by the SDOs;
- reporting on its functions to the National Commission for the Final Counting of Votes.

Membership of these Commissions comprise the President of the Divisional High Court as chairman; three representatives of the Administration appointed by the

SDO; one independent person appointed by the SDO in consultation with the political parties operating within the constituency; and one representative appointed by each political party contesting the election in the constituency.

(e) *The National Commission for the Final Counting of Votes*  
The functions of this Commission include:

- the verification of polling operations on the basis of reports and documents forwarded by the Divisional Supervisory Commissions;
- the rectification of counting errors;
- examining any reports and ballot papers which in its opinion have been wrongfully invalidated;
- recording any observations it deems fit to make on the regularity of the polling operations, but without the power to declare election results invalid;
- drawing up a report and forwarding it together with all the reports and appended documents from the Divisional Supervisory Commissions to the Constitutional Council.

Membership of this body comprises: a Supreme Court Judge appointed by the President of the Supreme Court as chairman; two other judicial officers also appointed by the President of the Supreme Court; ten representatives of the Administration appointed by the Minister responsible for Territorial Administration; and ten representatives appointed by the political parties taking part in the elections. The names of the members of this Commission were published in a Ministerial Order on 16 May 1997 and the Commission first sat on 22 May 1997.

(f) *The Constitutional Council*

The Constitution provides for the establishment of a Constitutional Council with power to proclaim publicly the results of the elections, after verifying all polling operations on the basis of reports and documents forwarded to it by the National Commission for the Final Counting of Votes. It will comprise 11 members appointed by the Head of State from among persons of established professional renown and high moral integrity. Three will be designated directly by the Head of State, three each by the Presidents of the National Assembly and the Senate, and two by the Higher Judicial Council.

Under the terms of the Constitution, the Constitutional Council is the body entrusted to receive claims and challenges arising from the National Assembly elections. Such complaints must be received within the maximum prescribed period of four days from the closing of the polls. The Council may take additional evidence from parties or any individual serving as a representative of the government lodging complaints.

The Council has to adopt and proclaim the results within a maximum period of 20 days from the date of the poll.

As the Constitutional Council had not been created by the time of the 17 May 1997 parliamentary elections, the powers of the Council were being exercised by the Supreme Court, all the members of which were appointed by the Head of State, on the advice of the Higher Judicial Council.

The four days immediately after the poll on 17 May included three public holidays. We sought and received assurances from MINAT and the President of the Supreme Court that their functions would not be disrupted by these holidays. However, on visiting the *Palais de Justice* on 21 May, we were informed that because of the holidays which had disrupted the compilation of results by Divisional Supervisory Commissions, a certain latitude had been exercised in receiving challenges after the allocated time. At the time of writing this Report, the Supreme Court had not sat to consider matters arising from the elections.

## Chapter 3

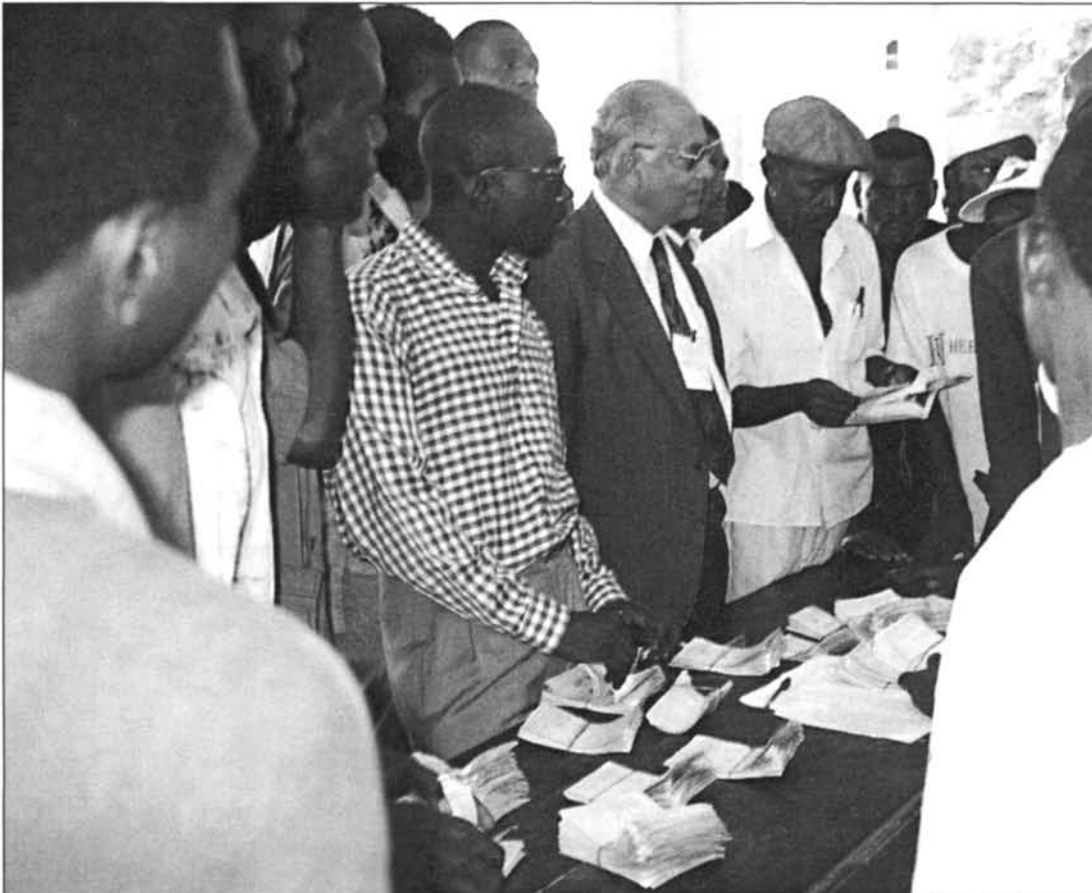
# Preparations for the Elections

### Registration of Voters and the Electoral Register

Voter registration and preparation of the voters' register are fundamental to the conduct of a credible election. In Cameroon, a register of electors is compiled at the divisional level with a separate register for each polling station. An important qualification for registration is that an elector has to be aged 20 years or more, and to have resided in the sub-district for at least six months.

We found that voters' registers were generally not available for public scrutiny three days before the poll as required by law and that Local Polling Commissions did not receive their copies of the register until the morning of the elections or late on the evening before. Thus, both the voters themselves and polling officials who had the task of checking the register against the names of voters as they came in to vote, were seeing the register for the first time. Very few polling stations had additional copies for public reference.

Each voter should be allocated a registration number which appears on her/his voter's card. The register should be revised annually beginning on 1 January but registration ceases with effect from the date an election is declared. In the case of the 17 May 1997 elections to the National Assembly, registration which began after the municipal elections



*Cards, cards, cards ... Commonwealth Observer Rezaul Karim (centre) talks to electoral officials and voters who had gathered at a Yaoundé Divisional Office to collect their voter registration cards*

of January 1996 ceased as of 2 April 1997, the date the President called the elections.

We were informed by MINAT that there was a total of 3,719,774 eligible voters on the register. Having regard to the size of the population of 14 million as estimated from the census of 1987, one would have expected the number of voters to have been substantially higher. The number of voters also showed a drop of some 300,000 from the number of voters who were on the register used for the municipal elections in January 1996.

Acknowledging the low level of registration, MINAT explained that the register had been purged of names that had unlawfully appeared on it, including those of deceased persons and foreigners. It was also suggested that voter apathy may have played a role in the low registration and that many people made no effort to register or only did so after the declaration of the poll when, by law, the register had closed.

The preparation of the register had been completed before our arrival and, therefore, we had little opportunity to observe its preparation at first hand. We received many complaints from political parties, organisations and individuals that the register was seriously flawed. In particular, there were complaints that:

- (a) the dates and times of registration were inadequately publicised and the registration was often at inconvenient times and places;
- (b) after registration, names did not appear on the register;
- (c) some names appeared on registers other than at places where they registered;
- (d) representations to the authorities about rectification of the register were generally not acted upon;
- (e) the details in the register sometimes differed from the details on the national identity card or the voter's card;
- (f) applications to register were not always entered on the proper registration forms;
- (g) names appeared on the register of people who did not live in that locality;
- (h) some people were registered at more than one location;
- (i) registration was refused to people who had no certificate of residence;
- (j) in many instances, people were hindered rather than helped to register as voters;
- (k) the receipts for application to register were not accepted as proof of registration or not given at all.

These complaints were compounded by the fact that voters were not given the opportunity to scrutinise the register before polling day. As a result, in the run-up to polling day, many voters were uncertain as to whether they could vote and, if so, at which polling station.

Another factor of uncertainty was the considerable increase in the number of polling stations from the 13,817 used for the January 1996 municipal elections to 16,010 for the parliamentary elections. We were informed by MINAT that the increase in the number of polling stations was a result of the decision to reduce the number of voters per polling station from 800 to a maximum of 500 in order to prevent congestion.

#### **Distribution of Voters' Registration Cards**

The revised electoral law provides that each registered voter shall be issued with a registration card, containing personal details corresponding to their National ID Card for the purposes of identification. To be able to vote, voters had to prove their identity and show their voters' cards. However, the law also provided that the Local Polling Commission had discretion to allow voters to vote without a voter's card provided they were on the register and could prove their identity.

We were repeatedly told by political parties, organisations and individuals that a large number of those who had registered had not received their registration cards prior to polling day. There were allegations that this was a deliberate policy on the part of district officials. It was also alleged that the voters' cards, instead of being held at Divisional offices for collection, were often entrusted to traditional chiefs and other unauthorised persons for distribution.

MINAT acknowledged that with only one week to polling day, a substantial number of voters' registration cards remained to be distributed. The Vice-Prime Minister had asked all

*Still cards ... a Public Notice is displayed outside the Limbe Divisional Office informing voters of 3,678 registration cards still to be collected*

officers to accelerate this process and said that everything would continue to be done to ensure that as many as possible of the remaining cards were distributed before polling day. Provision was made for those cards that still remained unclaimed by their owners to be deposited for collection at the relevant polling stations on election morning. The Vice-Prime Minister also assured us that he would issue instructions to make it clear that voters whose names were on the register but who did not have a voter's card should be allowed to vote on producing their National ID Card; and that radio announcements would be made to advise voters who had not received their cards to collect them at their respective polling stations on election day.

On voting day we observed voting cards under the control of government officials, namely *chefs de quartier*. Such control is not provided for in the electoral law and, in our view, is an invitation to the abuse of voting cards in favour of the party to whom these *chefs* owe allegiance.

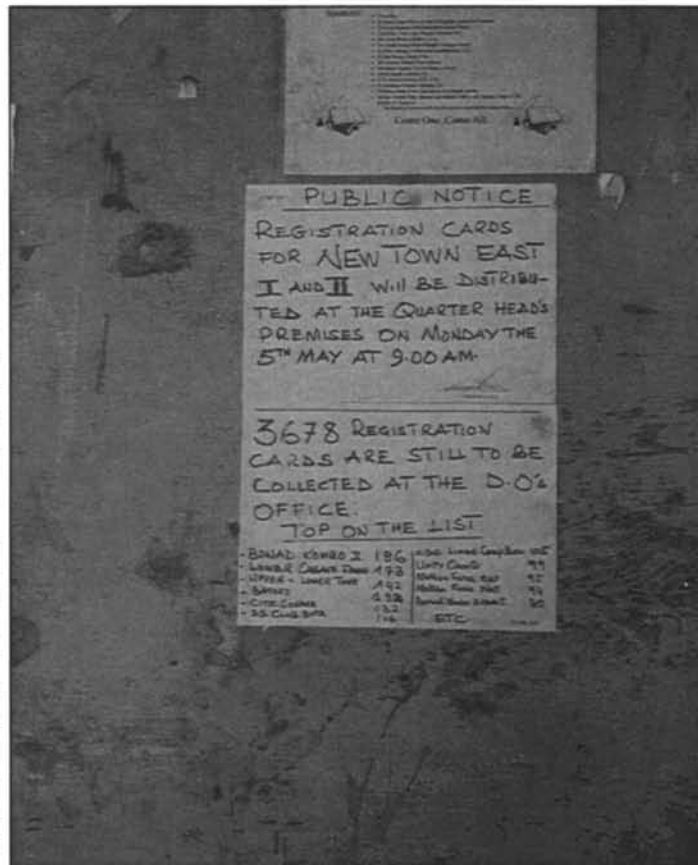
### Nominations

Political parties wishing to contest seats in a constituency are required under the electoral law to submit a candidate or list of their candidates for the constituency, together with a list of alternate names to the SDO of the constituency concerned not later than 40 days before elections. In the case of the parliamentary elections, declared on 2 April for 17 May, this meant that lists of candidates had to be submitted within a period of five days only. The SDO is required, within seven days of receipt of a list, to decide on whether it is in conformity with the law. If the list is rejected, the SDO is required to state the reasons for so doing and to inform the Divisional Supervisory Commission. The SDO must, in any event, forward the list to the Minister responsible for Territorial Administration within ten days from the date it was received.

The decision of the SDO to accept or to reject a candidate or list may be challenged in the Supreme Court within five days of notification of the rejection and the Supreme Court then has 15 days to rule on the appeal. In the 1997 parliamentary elections, the Supreme Court ruled in favour of six appeals that came before it resulting in either the reinstatement of the candidates concerned, or leave being granted to a party to substitute another person.

The law further provides that the Minister responsible for Territorial Administration is to publish the list of all candidates for election not later than 20 days before the poll. The full list of candidates for the elections should thus have been published by 27 April 1997. In fact, it was not published until 7 May.

Some opposition parties complained about the short period of time allowed for the



submission of lists and about the manner in which their lists were processed, alleging that they were not informed until the last moment as to whether or not their lists had been accepted. It was also alleged that in some cases no reason was given for rejections. The Ministry of Territorial Administration explained that it had tried to accommodate the deficiencies in the lists submitted by some of the political parties and had been flexible in regard to the dates although how that flexibility was demonstrated was not explained.

### **Voter Education and Training of Officials**

Although the state-owned daily newspaper published extracts from the electoral law, and MINAT issued a calendar in February 1997, attempts to educate the public in the electoral process appeared to be grossly inadequate. We saw little evidence of any real public education programme aimed at the illiterate and were unable to confirm from our observations how widely accessible or comprehensible this public education was.

In the later stages of the campaign there were television and radio broadcasts explaining the electoral process. We saw few posters, leaflets or other materials to promote civic education and to widen public appreciation of democratic processes.

We learned of seminars for training officials to carry out subsequent training sessions. Under a programme of technical assistance from the Canadian Government, a manual had been produced in conjunction with MINAT and the Advanced Institute of Public Management as a guide for officials and political agents and, along with materials produced by other local agencies, was commonly used for training during the days immediately prior to polling. Many of us observed training sessions which were well conducted and well attended.

### **Domestic Observer Groups**

We were told that a nationwide programme for the training of some 2,000 or more domestic monitors had been cancelled at the eleventh hour by the Government. The reason given by MINAT for this was that the training and selection of participants would not be politically impartial. This meant that the number of independent local observers was greatly reduced and we encountered few local monitors on polling day.

We are aware, however, that MINAT accredited seven NGOs who fielded a total of some 600 local observers. These were:

- *Groupe d'Initiative Commune pour la Promotion de la Démocratie et la Défense des Droits de l'Homme (GIC-PRODHOM);*
- *Action des Chrétiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture (ACAT), Cameroun;*
- *L'Association des Droits de l'Homme – Mouvement National de Dialogue;*
- *Mouvement Humano-Culturel Camerounais (MOHUCA);*
- *Service Ecuménique pour la Paix et la Promotion Humaine (Service Humanus);*
- *L'Organisation Camerounaise des Droits et Libertés du Citoyen (OCDLC);*
- *Fondation France-Afrique (a mixed group of Cameroonian and French citizens).*

## Chapter 4

# The Campaign and the Media

### The Campaign Period

The official campaign period for the 1997 parliamentary elections in Cameroon ran from 3 May 1997 to midnight on 16 May. The 180 National Assembly seats were contested in 58 constituencies, with candidates standing from 45 political parties. As stated in Chapter 1, with the exception of the CPDM, all the political parties were formed following the restoration of multi-party democracy in 1991.

Of the three major parties, the governing CPDM contested all 180 seats; the SDF, 167 seats; and the UNDP, 160 seats. There were a total of 1,165 candidates, of whom less than one per cent were women.

Despite early complaints about the short notice given for the nomination of candidates (see Chapter 3), the ability of most candidates to mount campaigns did not appear to have been seriously hampered. Many were already well known in their areas, and had been canvassing support for some time. In fact, some opposition parties had been campaigning since the legislative elections of 1992.

The electoral law covers the administrative framework of the campaign – including the term of the official campaign period, the requirements to submit a schedule of meetings/rallies to the local administrative authorities, and the prohibition of the distribution of partisan documents on polling day. The law also sought to set guidelines for the conduct of parties and their supporters during the campaign.

Given the number of parties contesting the elections, and the high level of awareness of the importance of the 1997 contest, we expected the campaign to have a more striking visual impact. We were surprised by the absence of the large posters and painted roadside billboards so common during election campaigns elsewhere. One of the reasons was that the electoral law limited the size of posters to 45 centimetres by 65 centimetres. Under the provisions of the law, candidates were offered space for displaying posters, manifestos, and other canvassing material near each polling station (the locations of which were not always known) and near sub-divisional and council offices, and some certainly made use of these facilities. However, in most government offices only the CPDM manifesto was displayed. In at least one province, these posters were meticulously removed on the eve of poll.

Rallies, meetings, and door-to-door canvassing took place in a lively, but calm, free and, in the main, tolerant atmosphere. There was general agreement among the political parties contesting the elections, that this was a marked improvement on campaigning in the past and a sign of the growing maturity of Cameroon's political parties.

We witnessed participation by supporters and party activists at rallies in Yaoundé before our deployment, and in all the provinces to which we were deployed. Participants in rallies grew noticeably more enthusiastic as polling day approached. It appeared to us that each party was allowed to campaign within the requirements of the law in an unhindered manner. Indeed, some meetings/rallies were held by different parties in sequence at the same place on the same day, and with one or two minor exceptions, all passed off peacefully.

The presence of the major party leaders drew the largest crowds. They began touring the country extensively even before the start of the official campaign period. Small rallies organised by local party activists introducing their candidates were also well attended and well organised. Many of these took place under the 'chairmanship' of a local dignitary who was often the local chief and supported the party in question. At the climax of the campaign, on the eve of the poll, the Prime Minister (CPDM) attended huge rallies in Buea (the capital of his home province) and in Yaoundé. Mr Fru Ndi of the SDF addressed an equally large number of people in Bamenda.

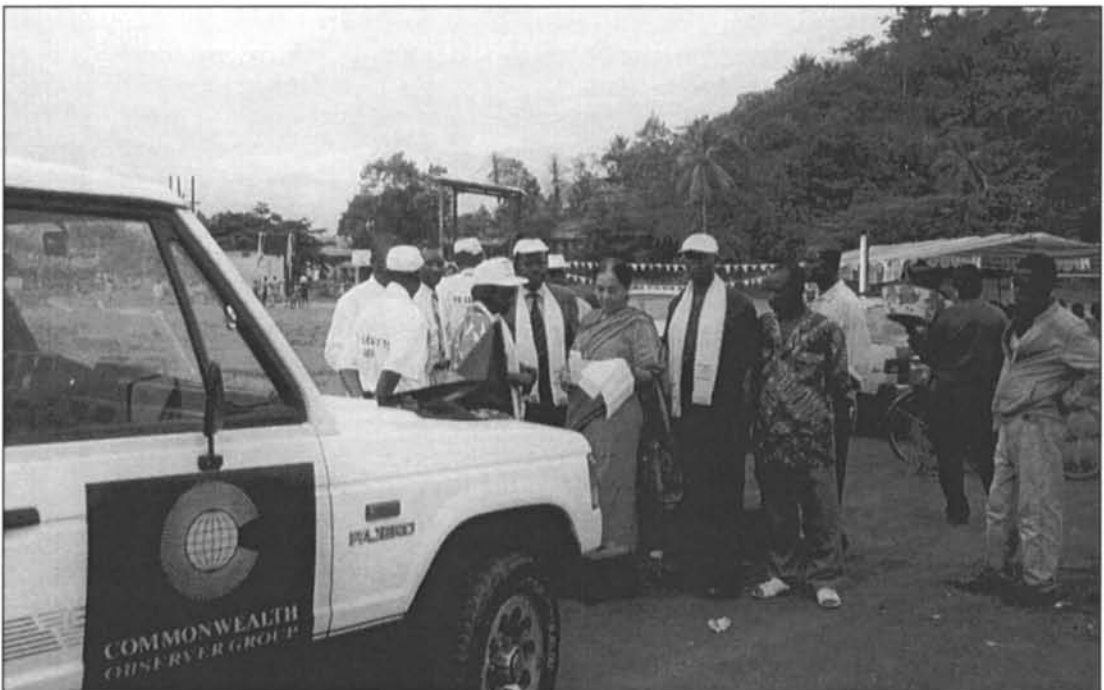
Crowds were addressed in French, English, local languages and in 'pidgin', with local issues and culture being used to convey each party's message and to encourage support.

As is true elsewhere, incumbency gave a clear campaigning advantage to the governing



*'Campaign wrappa' ... political parties printed cloth ('wrappa') in their party colours which was then made into clothes by party supporters: here, a length is hung between two trees, poster like*

party. In a country so large and with terrain as difficult as it is in some parts of Cameroon, access to air travel (planes or helicopters) or to fleets of hardy vehicles, were significant factors in the governing party's favour. In the early days of the transition, prior to the last national elections in 1992, the Government financed all political parties from central funds, but on the grounds that it placed too heavy a burden on the state, the practice ceased almost immediately.



*The next generation? ... Commonwealth Observer Margaret Alva (centre), Member of Parliament for 23 years, meets a female parliamentary candidate hoping to start her parliamentary career at a rally in South-West Province*

The electoral law sets no limit on the amount of money an individual may donate to a political party, nor the amount that may be spent during election campaigns.

A number of candidates were serving government officials. For example, in one province, the government-appointed chief executives of two municipal councils (Government Delegates) both stood as candidates for seats. In most systems of democratic government officials are required to resign before running for political office.

### **The Media**

The media in Cameroon are subject to the 1990 Law Relating to Freedom of Mass Communication. In 1996 an amendment to the Law abolished pre-publication censorship for domestic publications, although not for imported ones. Nevertheless, commentators continue to allege that the Government has retained other forms of prior restraint, such as seizure of printed editions, and bans on certain titles. Some leading journalists have suffered periods of detention without charge or trial, whilst others have been prosecuted under the charge of 'criminal defamation', often following an article critical of the Government. Various international media organisations have voiced their concerns about press freedom in Cameroon.

The Union of Journalists of Cameroon told us that earlier in the year the Union had initiated a programme, Media for Democracy, with the aim of ensuring objective reporting of the 1997 elections. Some 400 reporters underwent training at a workshop on election reporting, at the end of which they adopted the slogan 'Reporters, not supporters'. The consensus was that there was need to stop biased election coverage. We were told, however, that in all news organisations, policy is decided by the editors-in-chief, and that consequently reporting on the parliamentary elections remained subjective. In particular we were told that the electronic media gave an unfair advantage to the ruling CPDM in the election campaign but others disputed this.

### **Radio and Television**

The electronic media, which reach a far larger section of the population than the print media, are entirely under state control. Broadcasts are in both official languages – French and English.

The Ministry of Communications devised a basis for the sharing of airtime on radio and television for all the contesting parties in the weeks preceding the elections. Critics complained that the slots for the opposition were mostly during non peak-viewing hours, and that the reports of the opposition campaigns lacked depth. However, our observations did not bear this out.

Cameroon Television (CRTV) reports of election results started on Sunday 18 May, the day after the elections, and showed the CPDM with a strong, early majority. These reports were not based on any official figures and provoked counter claims from the opposition parties.

### **Print Media**

With regard to the print media, it was apparent to us that Cameroon now has a vigorous and reasonably free press, with some 50 newspapers in circulation, though not all on a daily basis. There is a government-owned daily newspaper, *The Cameroon Tribune*, which is bilingual. Many of the other newspapers, in both languages, openly support one or other of the opposition parties and are often critical of the Government. It is common at election time for a number of new papers to emerge, and the 1997 parliamentary elections period was no exception.

## Chapter 5

# The Poll and Count

Five days before election day we deployed in two-member teams to each of Cameroon's ten provinces, and visited 43 constituencies/divisions. We met with provincial and local officials of MINAT responsible for the administration of the elections in their areas, and in some cases the Provincial Governor. We also met local party representatives, Divisional Supervisory Commissions, chiefs, representatives of local NGOs, and individuals with an interest in the political process, as well as with a wide cross-section of Cameroonian society. In virtually all cases, we were well received.

All these contacts assisted us in assessing the state of administrative preparedness at the local level for the 17 May poll, as well as offering an opportunity to hear first hand how the wider public viewed the electoral process.

### Polling Day – 17 May 1997

On election day itself, we covered 350 polling stations, observing the opening of the poll, the casting of votes, the close of poll, the counting of ballots at polling stations and the onward despatch of Local Polling Commission reports through the SDOs to Divisional Supervisory Commissions.

The large majority of polling officials we encountered performed their duties in a commendable manner in often difficult and trying circumstances. However, a small minority appeared not to be familiar with the regulations pertaining to the elections or performed their duties in a partisan manner.

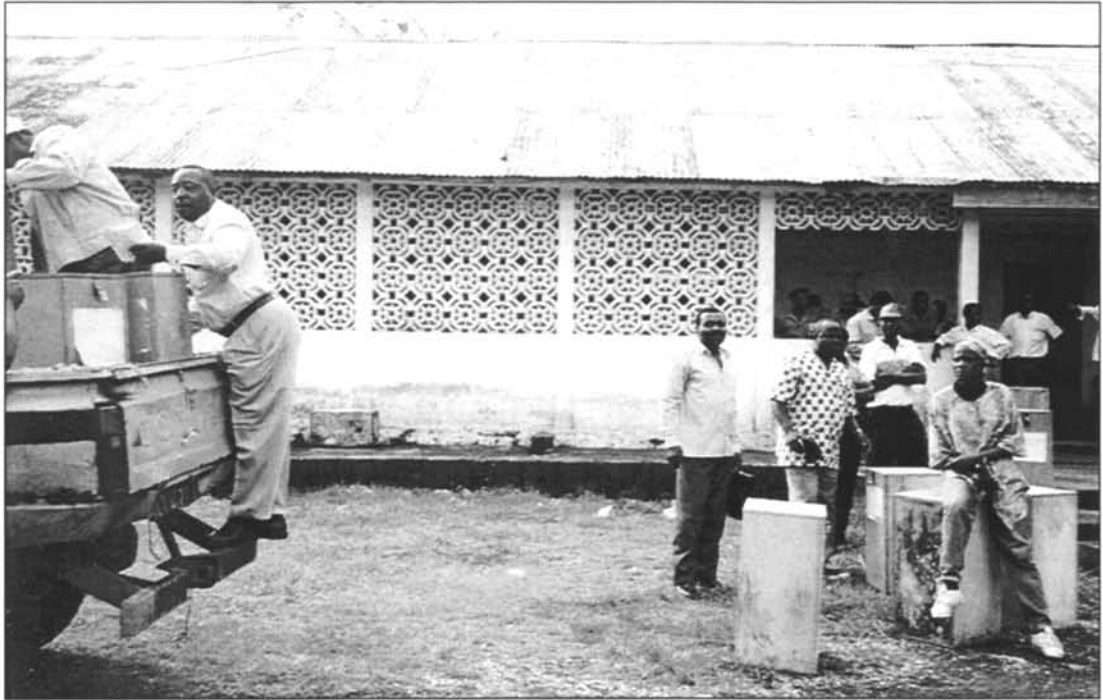


*A 'pousse-pousse boy' ... is a young man who pushes ('pousser') a trolley for a living: this one is delivering some wooden ballot boxes to be used on polling day*



*Facilities varied ... two polling stations in the North Province on polling day*





*All aboard ... some election materials being loaded for distribution on the morning of 17 May, while others await transport*

We were impressed by the general atmosphere of peace and calm which prevailed, and by the commitment of the people of Cameroon to the democratic process. At the same time, a number of the problems noted below created uncertainties and tensions on polling day.

### *The Polling Stations*

Most of us had obtained a list of polling stations for our assigned areas in advance of polling day. In this, we were more privileged than most Cameroonian citizens and voters.

Where the location of polling stations had been changed, or been newly established (which was the case for some 3,000 new stations), the necessary information was not readily available. This lack of transparency gave rise to rumours and allegations of 'phantom' polling stations which we received from various sources but were not able to substantiate.

During our briefing sessions, we received complaints that in a number of areas, polling stations were sited in the private residences of local community leaders or traditional chiefs who were known to be supporters of particular political parties. It was alleged that this amounted to intimidation of voters. It proved from our observations that a very high proportion of polling stations were indeed located in the houses (*chefferies*) or compounds of local chiefs (*l'amidos*), and *chefs de quartier* in both urban and rural areas. In one division of the nation's capital all the polling stations were sited in or adjacent to *chefferies*; another team observed that of a total of 106 polling stations in a division, 28 were in chiefs' palaces; in yet another province, private residences (*sarés*) accounted for the majority of polling stations. One team witnessed the relocation of a polling station from a chief's palace to a public place on the morning of election day as a result of protests by the voters gathered.

The facilities available and the layout of polling stations varied widely. Some were arranged in very basic lean-to structures; others were situated in public buildings such as schools, canteens or lecture halls. In the vast majority of cases, the facilities available – however rudimentary – allowed for privacy and assured the secrecy of the ballot. However, some teams observed the presence of unauthorised persons, notably chiefs and accompanying retainers, inside polling stations.

### *Arrangements for the Security of Election Materials*

Due attention was not always paid to the security and adequate storage of voting materials such as ballot boxes and ballot papers. In the most extreme case, one of our teams reported seeing a ballot box containing election materials left lying unattended at the roadside on polling morning.

The electoral law in Cameroon states that for every candidate or list of candidates the number of ballot papers to be printed should be equivalent to the number of the electors registered increased by 25 per cent. This means that each DO needed to be able to securely store hundreds of thousands of ballot papers, and ensure their safe distribution and despatch to each polling station.

Before entering the polling booth, each voter took or was handed a ballot paper for each party contesting the seat. (In one constituency there were as many as 14 candidates.) The voter was then required to cast a ballot by depositing one ballot paper in an envelope and discarding the rest. At the end of the counting process, valid ballots cast and discarded ballot papers are required to be burnt at the polling stations, while unused ballot papers are returned to divisional offices.

Before polling day we saw many 'loose' ballot papers in divisional offices. There were also 'loose' papers to be seen during and after polling day.

### *Opening of the Poll*

Under the terms of the electoral law, polling stations were scheduled to open for polling at 8 a.m. Once materials and personnel had arrived, the procedures for opening of the poll were generally well understood by the polling officials and voters who had gathered in order to observe the opening. We noted that if the correct procedure was not followed, polling agents and waiting voters were particularly vigilant and immediately demanded that the situation be rectified.

However, in some cases for reasons beyond the control of the local polling commission delays in opening occurred. In one province, a team observed that heavy rains in the early morning of 17 May affected the distribution of polling materials to the stations in the provincial capital.

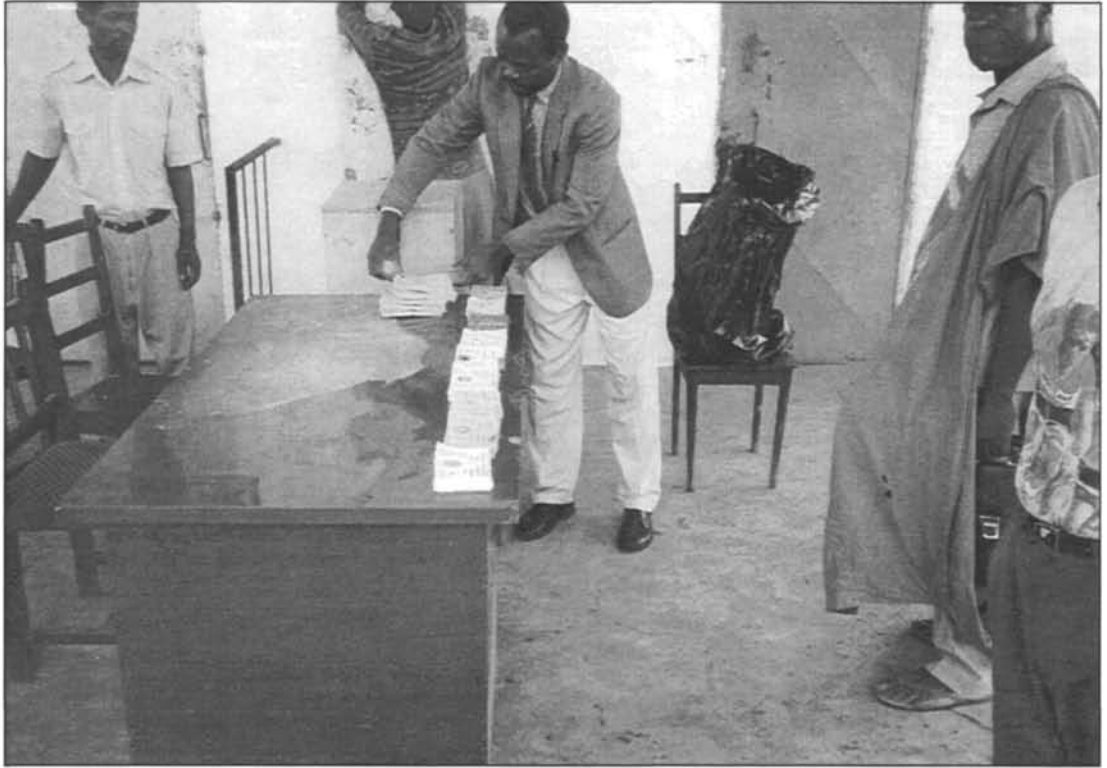
In another provincial capital, a team visited five polling stations between 7.30 a.m. and 8.45 a.m., none of which were ready for polling. On visiting the DO's office at 9 a.m., the team found 22 sets of polling materials, including ballot boxes and papers, still waiting to be conveyed to their respective stations. The DO explained that one party's ballot papers had not arrived on time and this had caused a delay in their preparations. This initial delay was then compounded by transportation difficulties and one station visited by the Observer team in that division did not open until 11.40 a.m. In another provincial capital, an Observer team received a reliable report of stations opening as late as 2.30 p.m. In other instances, delays were caused by the unavailability of Local Polling Commission members, in more than one instance because party representatives were denied access to the station for one reason or another.

In Maroua Rural Council Division, polling did not take place until the following day (18 May) as a result of an administrative oversight which had omitted it from inclusion within a constituency boundary when a special constituency was created by the 2 April decree. This omission was rectified by a presidential decree (No. 97-090). A second decree (No. 97-091) called the voters of Maroua Rural Council Division to vote on 18 May. Both decrees were issued on the night of 17 May, and as our team prepared to leave the province they observed polling taking place in this division.

### *The Casting of Votes*

Given the nature and extent of the complaints we received before polling day, particular attention was paid to the actual ability of voters to exercise their franchise.

Most of our teams found confusion among voters on polling day, caused by uncertainty over whether citizens who had presented themselves for registration were actually on the



*Down to business ... (above) the Chairperson of the Local Polling Commission lays out a pile of ballot papers for each party participating in the election ... (below) the empty ballot box is shown to voters before polling starts ... and (opposite) a lady casts her vote*





register, and if they were, at which polling station they were supposed to cast their vote. This uncertainty was compounded by the fact that many people did not receive their voters' cards before polling day; and where new polling stations had been established, it was only on receipt of a voter's card, that an individual knew where they were expected to cast their vote. We have noted the difficulties created by this situation in Chapter 3.

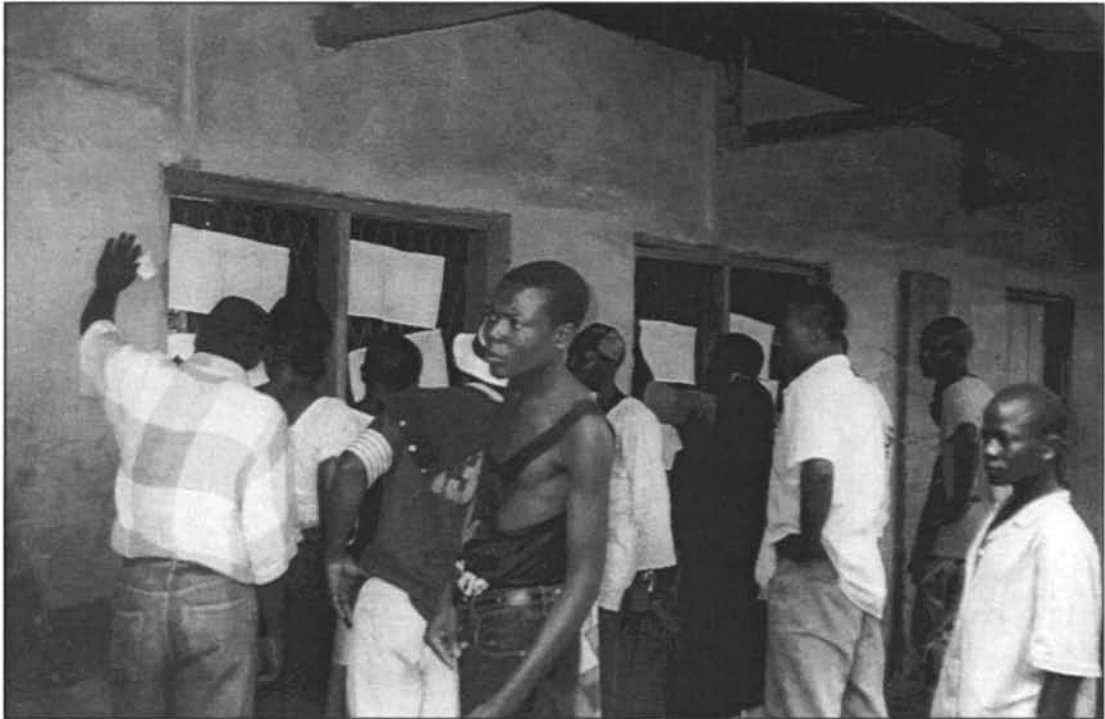
The issue of non-receipt of voters' cards prior to polling day was of particular concern. It was common at polling stations we visited to find a large number of cards waiting to be collected.

Indeed, a number of our teams encountered frustrated voters who had travelled some distance from where they were registered in search of their names at polling stations that they were not familiar with, and as late as 5 p.m. had had no success. Party agents were also seen travelling between stations informing those known to them where their cards were to be found. All this was against the background of a nationwide injunction on movement between towns, and localised restrictions on the movement of private vehicles on election day in certain areas.

Polling officials and members of the public alike voiced their frustration that those whose names appeared on the polling station lists were not known to them, whilst the people who had gathered outside their polling station they recognised as neighbours yet their names did not appear on the register. At a polling station we visited in the capital, not a single vote had been cast by 4 p.m. as no-one who had presented themselves by that time was on the list of voters at the station. In one polling station in a rural area among those who voted only five on a roll of 300 were said to have been recognised as being from that community. We also observed voters prevented from voting because of discrepancies between the details found on their national identity cards and those on their voter registration cards, or on the register itself. This problem – which appeared to be widespread – also served to fuel suspicions and allegations of selective disenfranchisement.

A number of us were handed copies of petitions addressed to Divisional Supervisory Commissions endorsed by chiefs or *chefs de quartier* who had undertaken registration drives in their areas, but who found that the voters' cards provided for distribution before polling day did not conform with the information that they had provided to the DOs. One chief was handed only 600 cards for a registered population of 1,200, and refused to take the responsibility for distributing any cards. In other cases, we witnessed voters' cards being held and distributed by chiefs and other unauthorised persons within or immediately adjacent to polling stations, although such practices are outside the electoral law.

In most locations women and the elderly who were in the queue were invited to move



*Anxious times ... voters check for their names on an electoral register displayed outside a polling station on polling day*

forward and vote ahead of men. However, one of our teams reported that in two remote enclaves they visited, the level of assistance required by women voters was such that it slowed the process down considerably. The Presiding Officers in each case therefore decided to allow men to vote first. We also received reports, though not many, of men being allowed to cast votes on behalf of their wives.

We noted with regret that no special provision was made within the law for assisted voting for blind or disabled persons and hope that the necessary framework will be provided at some time in the near future. In one isolated case a blind voter was turned away from a polling station. However, the general practice we observed was that disabled voters were indeed being assisted to exercise their franchise.

Several teams observed attempts at multiple voting or personation, and another team was given a detailed briefing on how multiple voting could be achieved.

From our observations, we concluded that many thousands of people were frustrated in their attempts to exercise their franchise and therefore may not have voted.

### *The Local Polling Commissions*

We noted that by and large the Local Polling Commissions were properly constituted, with the inclusion of representatives of the political parties contesting the election.

In some polling stations Presiding Officers exercised their judgment and were prepared to substitute political party representatives for those originally assigned to their polling stations; in other instances, tension and confusion was caused by the reassignment of party agents either by their party or on the orders of the DO. There were instances where such agents were not permitted to take their place on the Polling Commission because of minor discrepancies in their personal details.

Regrettably, our teams also observed that contrary to the provisions of the electoral law attempts were made to bar the polling agents of certain political parties from entry to a number of polling stations, and in some cases these attempts succeeded; in two cases we know of,

polling agents were physically assaulted and ejected from the polling station, leaving no substitutes behind. Some of these incidents occurred at those stations sited in chiefs' residences where only the agents of the party the particular chief supported were allowed to enter. In all the instances we observed, these problems caused the heightening of tensions among those gathered at the polling stations and undermined confidence in the transparency of the process.

As noted above, there were variations in the degree to which members of the commissions were acquainted with the process and the procedures which had to be followed. On some points of the law, the interpretation of different Presiding Officers, and even between commission members, was inconsistent. For example, there was some variation as to practice on the issue of whether voters whose names were on the register but did not have a voter's card could vote if they produced their national identity cards.

### *The Close of Poll*

Voting was officially scheduled to end at 6 p.m. The law allows that any persons in the queue at that time are entitled to cast their ballot before the ballot box is closed. Our teams observed that where the start of polling had been delayed, Presiding Officers exercised some discretion in allowing the polls to remain open slightly longer.

On the other hand, one Observer team found a polling station that had closed at 4 p.m., well ahead of the official time. The explanation given was that everyone on the list had voted. Another team was actually handed the result of the count at a polling station it visited shortly after 4 p.m. Here the reasons given for the early close of the station were poor lighting after 6 p.m. and the difficulty of negotiating the terrain to the divisional office in the dark. A particularly serious instance of early closing was observed at Balikumbat, in North-West Province, where one-third of the polling stations closed before the official time.

All our teams were present at stations to observe the close of the poll. We found that the procedures were unnecessarily complex and not uniformly followed, especially in the context of the many thousands of polling stations where lighting was a problem – some had not been



*More cards ... on polling day some voters were still looking through piles of uncollected cards left outside polling stations for their voter registration card*

provided with candles, lanterns/lamps or torches. Nevertheless, the procedures as laid down by the electoral law were generally adhered to by the polling officials and scrutineers present.

### The Count

This section deals with the early stages of the counting and confirmation process. The last stage of the Count is the final declaration of results by the Supreme Court on the advice of the National Commission for the Final Counting of Votes. The question of delays in the proclamation of results is a matter of concern to us.

As has been set out in preceding chapters, it is clear that the legal and administrative framework for the actual counting of ballots at polling stations allowed for a high degree of transparency and public scrutiny. Indeed, the counts we observed were conducted in an open and highly professional manner. In spite of bad weather in some areas, and failing light, many voters attended polling station counts and attentively followed each step of the process.

One Observer team received a report of ballot boxes being removed from polling stations by the DO immediately at the close of poll and before the count had begun in spite of the protests from the mayor and political parties. The following day, further information was sought from the relevant SDO, and the team was informed that the DO had acted to forestall any disputes that might have arisen due to the poor lighting and the onset of rain.

Notwithstanding the Ministerial Order modifying the terms of the electoral law, and two public statements by the Vice-Prime Minister on the issue, it became apparent to the teams during the course of the day that many polling stations had not been provided with more than two copies of the Counting Report forms (*procès verbaux*). One Observer team reported that no forms at all were issued to the overwhelming majority of the polling stations it visited during polling. However, at other stations the Counting Reports were correctly completed and distributed to candidates' representatives on the Local Polling Commissions.

In many areas networks of party agents and local observers also began the collation of polling station results as soon as these were ready, and some of the Observer teams were given typed or verbal unofficial 'results', before they left their deployment areas the next day. One team observed a Divisional Supervisory Commission which had been called into session at mid-day on 18 May 1997 to await the arrival of results.

The process following the count at polling stations, however, became less transparent. It is of concern that the cast ballots were burned immediately after the completion of the count as were the discarded ballot papers. We were also concerned to find at a number of Divisional Offices visited by our teams later in the evening of 17 May a large number of unsecured ballot papers.

At the time of writing this Report, the procedures for the filing of challenges with the Supreme Court following the count and the collation of results by each respective Divisional Supervisory Commission were still under way.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

We accepted our mandate as an opportunity to contribute to the consolidation of democratic processes and institutions in Cameroon. In so doing, we were conscious of the background to the 1997 parliamentary elections, Cameroon's acceptance of the Harare Commonwealth Declaration and its consequent admission to the Commonwealth in 1995. We appreciated that the 1997 elections were only the second National Assembly elections since the introduction of multi-party politics in 1991, and followed a controversial process of constitutional review. We welcomed the fact that the Government of Cameroon had seen fit to invite the Commonwealth Secretary-General to constitute an Observer Group, and that opposition political parties had endorsed the invitation.

We were enthusiastically received by virtually all sections of the community and civil society during our stay in Cameroon. Government representatives and agencies with whom we interacted were co-operative and helpful, and we acknowledge the dedication of many such representatives throughout the country, often working under difficult circumstances. We were able to travel freely and widely during our stay; we thus believe that our observations represent an accurate sampling of events pertaining to the elections.

We are pleased to have observed a political campaign which was marked by freedom of association and expression. We received reports of incidents of harassment and intimidation, but these in our view were not of a systematic nature. The media operated in a generally free environment and reflected the full range of political views. Polling day itself was marked by a general air of calm and order.

We received representations that the time allowed for nominations did not give political parties enough time to organise the registration of their candidates. Moreover, the fact that the registration of candidates and of party agents was performed by government officials also opened the way to complaints by opposition parties of unfair treatment.

We welcome the growth of consensual political procedures prior to the elections. We found that the provisions of the 1996 Constitution and the electoral law laid the ground for an adequate electoral process. At the same time, we recognise that these elections took place in the context of Cameroon's ongoing transition from a one-party state during which the governing party was intimately identified with the state and its bureaucracy. Accordingly, it is our view that the administration of the election apparatus by a government department under the leadership of a Minister of Government undermined confidence in the process.

In this context, we also do not consider that the composition of the National Commission for the Final Counting of Votes, with its large number of government officials provided sufficient assurances of transparency. Further, we urge that the constitution of such an important body, as well as of all the various other commissions involved in the electoral process, should take place early in the electoral time-frame.

We consider it unfortunate that some of the processes and institutions envisaged by the Constitution which would have increased the consensual climate were either not enacted or not created. The most important of these is the Constitutional Council. As a consequence, the Constitutional Council's intended responsibilities were given to the Supreme Court, all of whose members are appointed by the Head of State.

Even before our deployment we had cause to be concerned about the state of the electoral register and our experience on election day bore out many of our misgivings. We recognise that many people may have decided for various reasons not to register and that others who were registered decided to abstain from voting. However, as our Report has amply shown, there were very many others who wished to register and were prevented from doing so. These people were therefore disenfranchised as a result of serious flaws in the registration process.

The failure to publish or otherwise make available the new register to citizens in advance of polling day did not allow for the usual process of voter scrutiny or for corrections to be made. And on election day itself, we met many potential voters with evidence of



*Separate queues, equal votes ... women in Cameroon showed no less enthusiasm to exercise their franchise than their menfolk*

registration who were unable to vote because their names were not on the register.

MINAT informed us that following the municipal elections in January 1996, the Ministry had decided that in order to improve the conduct of polling and to ensure that voters did not have to travel long distances to vote, the maximum number of voters per station should be reduced, leading to the establishment of some 3,000 new polling stations. Our observations on polling day confirmed that steps had been taken to locate polling stations within easy distance of communities: however, the problems encountered with the distribution of voters' cards (which indicated at which polling station a voter was registered), taken together with the late publication of the new list of polling stations, resulted in many voters being unable to locate their designated station. The extent of the consequent disfranchisement of voters is a serious concern to us.

We found a lack of uniform practice in regard to the use of voter registration cards. In many cases these cards could not be obtained by registered voters prior to the polls; and in many cases they were not available at polling stations on polling day, contrary to the assurances given by the authorities. At some polling stations, voters who were on the register were permitted to vote without voters' cards provided they could establish their identity through their national identity cards; at other stations, this was not permitted – though provided for by the electoral law.

There was also little regularity in the distribution of voters' cards. Often this was conducted by unauthorised persons. Such a process is open to serious abuse.

In a one-party state, there can be no clear distinction between the resources of the party and those of the state. During Cameroon's relatively brief period of transition to multi-party

democracy, this distinction is still far from clear, giving the ruling party a marked residual advantage. We hope that in the future this distinction will be unequivocally established in order to ensure a level playing field.

While we recognise the important role of traditional rulers and *chefs de quartier* in the social fibre of Cameroon, we consider the practice of locating polling stations in or adjacent to their private residences to be detrimental to the progress that has been made towards the establishment of a neutral and transparent electoral system. Now that Cameroon has opted for a multi-party democratic system, the question is whether chiefs should play a role in the electoral process. We believe that any participation by the chiefs should be clearly defined by law in order that the neutrality of the election machinery is not compromised.

We have already commended the dedication and commitment of the vast majority of polling officials we observed on polling day. We also note that while many polling commission officials and sub-divisional officers carried out their duties in compliance with the letter and the spirit of the law, we received complaints and witnessed practices which suggest that a minority of polling officials did not do so. We recommend that a more extensive training programme for polling officials should be undertaken before the next phase of the electoral process in Cameroon. We would also suggest that political party agents should be included in any such training programme. Clear and uniform instructions on the electoral process should be formulated and disseminated; these should also be made available to all political parties, candidates, the media and the general public.

During our deployment, we saw many 'loose' ballot papers. While there were no indications that any group was attempting to use these to manipulate the process, a far stricter security regime should be established to prevent the perception that it is possible to perpetuate a fraud in this manner.

The present system under which electoral returns are processed over an extended period of time before official results can be announced, is seen as further detracting from the transparency of the elections, and as detrimental to public confidence.

We were informed that in the run-up to the elections there had not been an extensive voter education programme, but in the majority of the areas where we observed the polling and the count we were impressed by the level of awareness and understanding of the voters. We believe, however, that a thoroughgoing voter education programme would improve the final registration figures. It would also in time ensure the eradication of those isolated instances we observed where voters, particularly women, were not conversant with the process.

We noted earlier the absence of any provisions in the law to enable assisted voting for the blind and disabled. We hope that the necessary framework will be provided at some time in the near future.

We feel it is unfortunate that a programme for the training of 2,000 domestic observers was cancelled by the Government. In our experience, confidence in the electoral process is encouraged by the presence of well-trained domestic observers who often play a useful role in further strengthening the democratic process. Those domestic observers accredited by MINAT whom we met were fully involved in the electoral process and carried out their work with dedication. We were sorry there were not many more of them.

We are of the firm view that to hold a viable poll in Cameroon the creation of an impartial and autonomous institution, such as an independent electoral commission, with the necessary legal and financial authority, is a given requirement. This is particularly important in the context of the need to enhance the credibility of the outcome of the poll by divorcing the administration and conduct of the elections from the structures and institutions of the executive arm of government and the ruling party. We hope that our recommendation in this respect will be viewed in the spirit in which it is made – as a constructive proposal by which the consensual basis of future elections in Cameroon could be strengthened.

We also noticed very wide discrepancies between the sizes of population represented by constituency seats. An independent electoral body might also therefore be charged with the task of demarcating constituency boundaries to give effect to the cardinal principle of equal representation by population while taking into account peculiar local circumstances.

It is not within the mandate of the Group to reach political judgments. We have confined

our remarks to the electoral processes and structures we have observed, and on this basis it is our belief that confidence in the conduct of the 1997 National Assembly elections has suffered from a flawed base. This can be rectified. We feel sure that the people of Cameroon are ready to welcome progress in this regard. We urge international organisations, including the Commonwealth, and bilateral donors to give consideration to providing the relevant expertise and technical assistance.

It is our broad conclusion that, building on the progress that has already been made, the electoral processes and structures in Cameroon can be modified and strengthened in order to further consolidate democracy and the democratic culture.

# Acknowledgements

We wish to place on record our deep appreciation to the many persons and individuals who assisted us in a variety of ways during our mission. We have been particularly touched by the hospitality of the people of Cameroon who warmly welcomed us wherever we went. We wish them well in their efforts to achieve a fully democratic society.

We wish to express our appreciation to the Vice-Prime Minister responsible for Territorial Administration and the officials of the Ministry; the President of the Supreme Court; and to the officials of the Ministry of External Relations for giving so generously of their time. We also wish to thank the political parties, the various Cameroonian interest groups and non-governmental organisations, and representatives of the media, whose briefings greatly assisted us in our work.

Our thanks also go to the Commonwealth High Commissions in Yaoundé and other members of the diplomatic community for the many courtesies extended to us.

We wish to extend our appreciation to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Chief Emeka Anyaoku, for his support and for providing us with the opportunity to participate in this mission – which was a further expression of the Commonwealth's commitment to promoting democracy.

Finally, we would like to express our warm thanks to the staff of the Commonwealth Secretariat who accompanied us on our mission, and whose efficient support played such an important role in its accomplishment.

# **Annexes**

## ANNEX I

### Composition of the Commonwealth Observer Group

#### *The Hon Jean-Jacques Blais, PC, QC (Chairperson – Canada)*

The Hon Jean-Jacques Blais held several ministerial positions in the Government of Canada, the last being Minister of National Defence, until 1984. He was first elected to the House of Commons in 1972. Mr Blais now practises law in Ottawa where he advises clients on public administration and government relations. From 1984-91, as a Privy Councillor, Mr Blais was a member of the Security Intelligence Review Committee, reporting to Parliament on the activities of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service. He also chairs the Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies and the Lester B Pearson International Peacekeeping Centre. Mr Blais has served on several Commonwealth observer missions, the most recent being to the general election in Pakistan in February 1997.

#### *Mr Frank Abdulah (Trinidad and Tobago)*

Mr Frank Abdulah completed his diplomatic career in November 1988 after serving as Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Prior to this, he was High Commissioner in London with concurrent accreditation to several European capitals. Mr Abdulah was Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York from 1975-82, and among the positions which he held whilst at the UN was Chairman of the Committee of 24 – the Decolonisation Committee – from 1980-82. He was appointed Deputy Secretary-General of the Caribbean Community (Caricom) in 1989 and served in this capacity until 1993. Following his retirement, he has been involved in a number of human resource development projects and is currently president of the UN Association of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr Abdulah read Modern Languages at Magdalen College, Oxford.

#### *The Hon Margaret Alva, MP (India)*

A Member of Parliament since 1974, the Hon Margaret Alva was a Minister of State in the Central Government for ten years. A lawyer by profession, she has practised at the Supreme Court of India. As chairperson of the core group set up by the Government of India in 1989, Mrs Alva presented the National Perspective Plan for Women's Development and also served as chairperson of the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) Technical Committee on Women for two years. She was a member of the expert group formed by the Women's Division of the UN to assess the impact of the Women's Decade on 'Women in Decision Making', and on the panel of eminent persons constituted by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) to advise on a policy for human resource development for Asia and the Pacific. Mrs Alva was a member of the special advisory group of the UN Family Planning Association established as a follow-up to the Cairo Conference on Population. She currently serves as a member of both the Public Accounts Committee and the Foreign Affairs Committee of Parliament.

#### *Mr Charles Chadwick, CBE (Britain)*

After military service and graduating from the University of Toronto, Mr Charles Chadwick spent nine years with the overseas civil service in Zambia where his last post was Head of Administrative Training at the Staff Training College in Lusaka. He then joined the British Council, serving in Kenya, Nigeria, Brazil and London, and latterly as Director in Canada and Poland. He has observed elections for the Commonwealth in Ghana (1992) and Pakistan (1993), and for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in Uganda. He was a Provincial Supervisor for the independence elections in Zimbabwe and in 1994 was regional co-ordinator in Kwazulu/Natal for the European Union Election Observers in South Africa. He was also an elections Supervisor for the OSCE for the 1996 elections in Bosnia.

***The Hon Kenneth Dzirasah, MP (Ghana)***

The Hon Kenneth Dzirasah has been a Member of Parliament in Ghana since January 1993. Following his election as First Deputy Speaker in May 1994, he has chaired the Appointments Committee and the Privileges Committee of the House. He was chairman of the Constitutional, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs Committee of Parliament from 1993-95. A lawyer by profession, Mr Dzirasah was called to the Ghana Bar in October 1980, and practised law as a solicitor and advocate of the Supreme Court of Ghana until being elected to Parliament. Mr Dzirasah holds a Bachelor of Arts (Law and Sociology) honours degree from the University of Ghana, Legon, and a Barrister's Certificate from the Ghana School of Law. He was one time senior research writer of the *Weekly Spectator*, a Ghanaian national weekly newspaper and also served as the paper's Features Editor. In 1994, he served as a United Nations observer to the elections in South Africa.

***Mrs Charmaine Gardner (St Lucia)***

Mrs Charmaine Gardner served as Deputy President of the St Lucia Senate from 1987-96. She has also been a member of the Advisory Task Force to Caribbean Heads of Government on 'Caribbean Development to the Year 2000' and member of the Prime Minister's delegation on several missions. Mrs Gardner is also the managing director of Carasco & Son Ltd, St Lucia, and vice-president of the Caribbean Association of Industry and Commerce. She has served as president of the St Lucia Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture, a board member of the St Lucia Broadcasting Corporation, and private sector representative to the EU-ACP meetings which negotiated the Lomé II, III and IV agreements. She is presently on the Board of Governors of the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College and is a council member of the University of the West Indies (Cave Hill) and chairperson of the Housing and Urban Development Corporation of St Lucia. Mrs Gardner was educated at St Joseph's Convent, St Lucia, Jarvis Collegiate, Toronto, and holds a Bachelor of Arts degree (Sociology and Philosophy) from the University of Western Ontario.

***Mrs Trudy Gibson (Canada)***

Mrs Trudy Gibson is an Election Consultant. She has been involved in elections since she was a candidate at the provincial level in the early 1970s. In 1974, she served as a federal returning officer, and from 1977-92 as an electoral administrator at Elections Canada. Mrs Gibson joined the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia from July 1992 to July 1993 as an election administrator. Subsequently, she has been a consultant in Uganda and in Kiev, and did observation work in Uganda and Tanzania. She was educated at Mount Allison University and Ottawa University.

***Mr Selwyn Jones (St Vincent and the Grenadines)***

Mr Selwyn Jones is Supervisor of Elections of St Vincent and the Grenadines and is responsible for voter registration and organising all elections in that country. He was previously Deputy Supervisor of Elections and a Registering Officer in conjunction with his substantive post as Project Manager in the Ministry of Education. He worked as a Presiding Officer at two general elections and as a Returning Officer on three occasions. He was educated at the St Lucia Technical Teachers' College and Huddersfield Polytechnic, Britain.

***Mr M M Rezaul Karim (Bangladesh)***

A retired career diplomat and educated at Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, USA, Mr Rezaul Karim was Bangladesh High Commissioner to Britain and Sri Lanka, and Ambassador to China, the Soviet Union, Iran and Iraq. He was the Secretary to Government before his retirement in 1992 and has since worked as an expert on rural poverty alleviation. Mr Karim participated as a delegate to five Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings and

attended many UN and international conferences, including sessions of the UN General Assembly, summits of the Non-Aligned Movement, Organisation of the Islamic Conference and SAARC. He acted as an International Observer at the parliamentary elections in Sri Lanka in 1994. Mr Karim is at present a freelance newspaper columnist and a member of the Advisory Council of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

***The Hon Mamagana-Malose Anna Nyama, MP (South Africa)***

The Hon M M A Nyama is usually called 'Koti' Nyama. She is a member of the Northern Provincial Legislature in the Republic of South Africa and is currently Deputy Speaker in the Legislature. She chairs the Internal Arrangements Committee of the Legislature and sits on the Rules Committee. A teacher by profession, she was a lecturer at a teachers' training college before joining the Provincial Legislature. Ms Nyama was on the government delegation to the UN Beijing Conference on women and takes a keen interest in women's emancipation issues. She observed elections in Mozambique as an AWEPA delegate in 1994.

***The Hon Daivanaden Poinoosawmy, MP (Mauritius)***

The Hon Daivanaden Poinoosawmy has been a member of the National Executive of the Mauritius Labour Party since 1980. He has been active in trade union and youth organisations in Mauritius, especially in the rural areas. He is one of the founding members of the Mauritius Graduates' Union. He has held senior executive positions in three multinational textile companies. He was elected to serve as a Member of the National Assembly in December 1995.

***Mr Bernardin Renaud (Seychelles)***

Mr Bernardin Renaud is a practising barrister and attorney-at-law in the Supreme Court of Seychelles. He is a member of the Board of Examiners for the admission examination of barristers. He has been in the public sector since 1965, and was the Labour Commissioner, Chairman of the Port Labour Board, and Chairman of the Occupational Health and Safety Board from 1980-86. Mr Renaud has been involved in electoral and constitutional activities in Seychelles in various capacities. He was the Chief Electoral Officer for the elections to the Constitutional Commission in July 1992; Legal Secretary of the Constitutional Commission in September 1992; and Chief Electoral Officer for the Referendum in November 1992. He has been Registrar of Political Parties since February 1993. From January to May 1993, he was the Chairman of the Seychelles Constitutional Commission and was the Director of Elections for the first Presidential and National Assembly elections in July 1993. Since 1989, Mr Renaud has been chairman of the Apex Organisation of NGOs, and was the head of delegation to the Commonwealth NGO Forum in Zimbabwe in 1991. He served as a member of the International Observer Group of French-speaking Parliamentarians to Senegal in 1993, and in the same year as a Commonwealth observer to the elections in Pakistan. He was a UN consultant on the feasibility of holding elections in Liberia in 1994. Mr Renaud was educated in Seychelles, Kenya, Britain and Tanzania. He has been the National Ombudsman in Seychelles since November 1993.

**SECRETARIAT SUPPORT STAFF**

Mr J P Sheppard, Team Leader

Mr R Nzerem, Assistant to Observers

Ms S Pepera, Assistant to Observers

Ms N John, Assistant to Observers

Ms A Yeboah-Afari, Media Liaison and Assistant to Observers

Ms M Roberts, Assistant to Observers

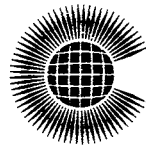
Ms L McLaren, Assistant to Observers

Mr P Ramgulam, Assistant to Observers

Mrs G Mason, Administrative Officer

## ANNEX II

Commonwealth News Release of 7 May 1997



# Commonwealth News Release

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97/20

7 May 1997

## Commonwealth to Observe Parliamentary Elections in Cameroon

A team of 13 Commonwealth Observers, together with a supporting team from the Commonwealth Secretariat, will be present in Cameroon for the elections to the National Assembly which are to be held there on 17 May 1997.

In making this announcement today, Commonwealth Secretary-General Chief Emeka Anyaoku said that the Commonwealth was responding to a request from the Government of the Republic of Cameroon for a Commonwealth Group to observe the parliamentary elections. An Assessment Mission from the Commonwealth Secretariat, which visited Cameroon in April, established that there was widespread political support for a Commonwealth presence during the elections.

The Commonwealth Observer Group to Cameroon will be led by the **Hon Jean-Jacques Blais**, a former Minister in the Canadian Government. The other observers will be:

<b>Mr Frank Abdulah</b> Former Diplomat	Trinidad and Tobago
<b>Hon Margaret Alva</b> Member of Parliament	India
<b>Mr Charles Chadwick</b> Former Public Servant	Britain
<b>Hon Kenneth Dzirasah</b> Member of Parliament and First Deputy Speaker	Ghana
<b>Senator Charmaine Gardner</b> Former Deputy President of the Senate	St Lucia
<b>Ms Trudy Gibson</b> Electoral Expert	Canada

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*Issued by the Information and Public Affairs Division, Commonwealth Secretariat  
Marlborough House, Pall Mall, London SW1Y 5HX, Britain.  
Tel: 0171-747 6385/6; Fax: 0171-839 9081; Telex: 27678*

<b>Mr Selwyn Jones</b> Supervisor of Elections	St Vincent and the Grenadines
<b>Mr M M Rezaul Karim</b> Former Diplomat	Bangladesh
<b>Mr Masing R Luru</b> Electoral Commissioner	Vanuatu
<b>Hon M M A Nyama</b> Deputy Speaker Northern Provincial Legislature	South Africa
<b>Hon Daivanaden Poinosawmy</b> Member of Parliament	Mauritius
<b>Mr Bernardin Renaud</b> Ombudsman and former Chief Electoral Officer	Seychelles

The Group will be supported by a nine-member team from the Commonwealth Secretariat, led by Mr Jon Sheppard, Director of the Political Affairs Division.

*Note to Editors: The mission to Cameroon will be the 21st election observer mission mounted by the Commonwealth since October 1990; the most recent of which was in Pakistan in February. The observer missions are to be seen in the context of a decision taken by Commonwealth Heads of Government to support the promotion of democracy in a number of ways, including the observation, on request, of elections in member states.*

*Cameroon joined the Commonwealth as its 52nd member state on 1 November 1995. This will be the first time that the Commonwealth has observed elections in that country.*

**ANNEX III****Arrival Statement of 9 May 1997**

Cameroon Parliamentary Election, 1997

**Commonwealth Observer Group***News Release***Arrival Statement by the  
Commonwealth Observer Group**

We are pleased to be here in Cameroon at this important time. We have come in response to a request from the Government of Cameroon to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Chief Emeka Anyaoku, for the Commonwealth to observe the Parliamentary Elections on 17 May 1997. In recent consultations with the Commonwealth Secretariat, this request was endorsed by all the major political parties involved in the elections.

Our Group has been drawn from 12 Commonwealth countries. We each serve in our personal capacities and not as representatives of the countries, governments or the organisations to which we may belong. Our objective is to observe the organisation and conduct of the elections in accordance with the laws of Cameroon, and to register our views on the process based upon our observations.

We have no executive role. On completion of our task we will present a report to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, who will make it available to the Government of Cameroon and to the political parties taking part in the elections, and thereafter to all Commonwealth governments.

\* Nous considérons notre rôle durant les élections législatives comme étant une partie essentielle de l'engagement du Commonwealth de renforcer le processus démocratique chez ses états membres. Durant l'exercice de notre mandat, nous aurons des échanges avec les parties politiques, le Ministère de l'Administration du Territoire auquel est confié l'organisation des élections ainsi qu'avec d'autres intéressés à l'exercice en cours. Nous anticipons avec intérêt être informé quant aux préparatifs pour la tenue des élections et nous nous disperserons vers les diverses régions du pays et avant et après le 17 mai prochain pour poursuivre nos activités.

\* We consider our role in observing these elections as part of the Commonwealth's commitment to strengthening the democratic process in member countries. In carrying out this mission we will remain in close touch with the political parties, the Ministry of Territorial Administration which is responsible for organising the election, and others involved in the election exercise. We look forward to being briefed on the preparations for the poll, and to travelling to many parts of the country before and on polling day.

We would like to thank the Commonwealth Secretary-General for placing his confidence in us, and for the tremendous support he has already shown to our assignment. We view his recent consultations with the President, Government and Opposition Leaders, and our presence here as observers, as a clear indication of the Commonwealth's sincere commitment to supporting Cameroon's democratisation process.

We particularly look forward to a happy collaboration with the ACCT Group of Observers. As the Secretary-General informed you yesterday, this is the first time that the Commonwealth will have worked so closely with another international observer group and this is a manifestation of the priority that the Commonwealth gives to consensus-building.

We consider it an honour to be here at this juncture and hope to assist in whatever ways we can in Cameroon's political and democratic development.

Hilton Hotel  
Yaoundé  
9 May 1997

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The Commonwealth Observer Group Media Liaison Officer is Ms Ajoa Yeboah-Afari, who can be contacted at the Commonwealth Observer Group Office, Essingan A on Level 01 of the Hilton Hotel, Yaoundé. Tel No: 23 36 46 x 1175

## *ANNEX IV*

### Schedule of Engagements

#### **Thursday 8 May**

1850 Arrival at Nsimalen International Airport, Yaoundé, followed by meeting with the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Chief Emeka Anyaoku, at the VIP Lounge

#### **Friday 9 May**

1000 Arrival Press Conference, Hilton Hotel, Yaoundé

1100 Briefing by Directors of the Ministry of Territorial Administration: Dr P Ngwese-Ngolle (Organisation), Mr E Eban-Otong (Political Affairs), Mr M Hgabe (Legal Affairs) and Dr E Essousse (Deputy-Director, Elections)

1500 Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM): Mr G Owona (Deputy Secretary-General) and Dr F Azu'u (Member, Central Committee)

1800 Briefing by the diplomatic community, hosted by Mr Peter Broom, British Deputy High Commissioner

#### **Saturday 10 May**

0730 Briefing by Mr Akere Muna, President of the Cameroon Bar Association

0830 Social Democratic Front (SDF): Mr Suleyman Muhammet (Vice-President), Alhadji Sani (Chairman of Central Province) and others

1000 Representatives of the *Union Nationale pour la Démocratie et le Progrès* (UNDP)

1130 Briefing by Dr Solomon Nfor Gwei (Chairperson, National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms) and Justice (Mrs) Lucy Gwanmesia (Member, NCHRF)

1545 Briefing by representatives of the Association of Women Jurists (ACAFEJ)

1700 Briefing by Mr Herbert Boh, Secretary-General, Union of Journalists of Cameroon, and colleagues

1900 Chairperson's Reception

#### **Sunday 11 May**

1030 Deployment briefing

1800 Political party rally in Yaoundé

#### **Monday 12 May**

0900 Representatives of the *Union Démocratique du Cameroun* (UDC)

1000 Call by group of Observers on Justice Dipanda Mouelle, President of the Supreme Court

Tour by group of Observers of Yaoundé divisions to view the process of distribution of voters' cards

### **Tuesday 13 May**

Deployment Day

1000 Chairperson's meeting with the Hon Gilbert Andze Tsoungui, Vice-Prime Minister responsible for Territorial Administration, and senior directors, MINAT

### **Wednesday 14 - Thursday 15 May**

Visit by Chairperson and Secretariat Team Leader to North-West Province

Field observation in deployment areas

### **Saturday 17 May**

Observation of Poll and Count on Polling Day

### **Sunday 18 May**

Return from deployment to Yaoundé

### **Monday 19 May**

0900 Debriefing and consideration of draft report

1230 Debriefing and exchange with the ACCT Observer Group, hosted by the French Ambassador

1630 Continuation of debriefing and consideration of draft report

1930 Observers' Press Conference – Interim Statement

2030 Dinner hosted by the Canadian High Commissioner

### **Tuesday 20 May**

Continued consideration of draft report

**Wednesday 21 May**

Continued consideration and finalisation of draft report

- 1830 Reception for the Commonwealth Observer Group hosted by the Hon Peter Musonge, Prime Minister of Cameroon

**Thursday 22 May**

- 0830 Finalisation of Report

Issue of Departure Statement

- 1700 Farewell Reception for the International Observers hosted by the Hon Gilbert Andze Tsoungui

Departure from Yaoundé

**23 - 29 May**

Two observers, Mr Frank Abdulah (Trinidad and Tobago) and Ms Trudy Gibson (Canada), plus Secretariat support staff, remain in Yaoundé to follow the proceedings of the National Commission for the Final Counting of Votes and the Supreme Court with regard to the compilation and proclamation of results

*ANNEX V***Statement on the Deployment of Commonwealth Observers, 12 May 1997**

Cameroon Parliamentary Election, 1997

**Commonwealth Observer Group***News Release*

12 May 1997

**Commonwealth Observer Groups Deploy to the Regions**

The 12-member Commonwealth Observer Group in Cameroon leaves Yaoundé tomorrow, 13 May, for the regions. The observers, assisted by staff of the Commonwealth Secretariat, will be deployed in teams to the 10 provinces of Cameroon where they will observe the last days of the campaign and the preparations for the Parliamentary Election on Saturday, 17 May.

Since its arrival in the country on 8 May, the Group has held meetings with a wide cross-section of society, including the Ministry of Territorial Administration, which is responsible for organising the election, political parties, human rights organisations, professional associations, and other non-governmental bodies. The Commonwealth Observers will be working in close co-operation with observers from L'Agence de Co-operation Culturelle et Technique (ACCT) based in Paris.

The Group will be deployed as follows:

Central Region	Hon Jean-Jacques Blais (Chairman ) Mr Jon Sheppard Mrs Gina Mason
Far North	Hon Daivanaden Poinosawmy Ms Lorna McLaren
North	Hon Kenneth Dzirasah Mr Prakash Ramgulam
Amadaoua	Mr Bernadin Renaud Mrs Charmaine Gardner
East	Mrs Trudy Gibson Mr Richard Nzerem

South	Mr Selwyn Jones Ms Ajoa Yeboah-Afari
Littoral	Mr M M Rezaul Karim Ms Noreen John
West	Mr Frank Abdulah Ms Maryse Roberts
South West	Hon Margaret Alva Ms Sandra Pepera
North West	Mrs M A Nyama Mr Charles Chadwick

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*Note to editors:*

*The Commonwealth Observers will depart from the Yaoundé Hilton Hotel at 7. 30 a.m. tomorrow, 13 May. The media is invited to cover the departure.*



Cameroon Parliamentary Election, 1997

## Commonwealth Observer Group

DEPLOYMENT					
ACCOMMODATION					
No.	Region	Name of Observer	Location	Name of Hotel	Telephone No.
1.	Littoral	Mr M M Rezaul Karim Ms Noreen John	Douala	Le Meridien	42 90 44
2.	South West	Hon Margaret Alva Ms Sandra Pepera	Buea	Mountain Hotel	c/o Christopher Ekungwe, Soweda 32 22 06
3.	North West	Hon Ms M A Nyama Mr Charles Chadwick	Bamenda	Hotel Ayaba	36 13 21/ 36 13 56
4.	Amadaoua	Mr Bernardin Renaud Mrs Charmaine Gardner	Ngaoundere	Hotel Transcam	25 10 41 Fax: 25 12 52
5.	Far North	Hon Daivanaden Poinosawmy Ms Lorna McLaren	Maroua	Mizao Hotel	29 13 04
6.	North	Hon Kenneth Dzirasah Mr Prakash Ramgulam	Garoua	Relais St Hubert	27 30 33
7.	East	Mrs Trudy Gibson Mr Richard Nzerem	Bertoua	Mansa Hotel	24 16 50/ 24 14 96 Fax: 24 15 88
8.	West	Mr Frank Abdulah Ms Maryse Roberts	Bafoussam	Tal Motel Touristique	44 41 85/ 44 61 81
9.	South	Mr Selwyn Jones Ms Ajoa Yeboah-Afari	Ebolowa	Hotel Le Ranch	28 35 32 Fax: 28 49 34
10.	Centre	Chairman Mr Jon Sheppard Mrs Gina Mason	Yaoundé	Hilton Hotel	23 36 46 (Office extn. 1175/1176) Fax: 22 32 10

Hilton Yaoundé • Boulevard du 20 Mai - BP 11852 • Yaoundé • Cameroon  
Tel: (237) 23 36 46 • Fax: (237) 22 32 10

11 May 1997

*ANNEX VI***Observation Notes for Poll and Count and Check List for Polling Station Visits**

Cameroon Parliamentary Election, 1997

**Commonwealth Observer Group****OBSERVATION NOTES FOR POLL AND COUNT****PART A**

The Observers may focus particular attention on the following aspects of the conduct of the election:

**THE CAMPAIGN**

1. Balance of TV/radio election coverage and extent and nature of access by the parties (e.g. allocation of time for political broadcasts and advertisements).
2. Print media: nature of coverage and extent of access by the political parties.
3. The tone and content of material put out by the political parties, access to printing facilities?
4. The conduct of political meetings/rallies (permits for public meetings?)
5. The conduct of house-to-house canvassing of voters.
6. Nature, scale and effectiveness of Election management body and other voter education on radio and television, in the print media and by other methods.
7. Activities/measures to encourage the participation of women.
8. Access to funds and sources of funds.
9. Has there been violence/intimidation and/or tolerance and restraint?
10. In general, has the campaign been conducted according to standard democratic norms?
11. Have there been any barriers to travel by Party leaders and activists?
12. Have political rallies and other activities been permitted when/as requested?

### THE POLL

1. Location of polling centres
2. Instances of potential voters turned away for alleged irregularities, and the nature of such problems.
3. Distances travelled by voters to polling centres, particularly in rural areas.
4. The procedure followed at the opening of the poll.
5. The length of time voters wait to cast their votes.
6. The adequacy or otherwise of facilities at polling stations and their state of readiness.
7. Availability of adequate supplies, e.g. ballot papers, official stamps and stamp-pads, indelible ink, etc.
8. The performance of electoral officials at the polling centres/booths visited.
9. The procedures in place to ensure proper security of ballot papers, ballot boxes and official seals.
10. Arrangements to facilitate voting by women.
11. The steps taken to ensure that the secrecy of the ballot is assured.
12. The measures taken to ensure the security of discarded ballots.
13. The general atmosphere at the polling centres/booths visited.
14. Access of party agents and observers to polling centres and the performance of party agents.
15. Presence and activities of gendarmerie and/or other security forces.

### THE COUNT

1. Inspection of seals.
2. The process of reconciling the number of people who voted with the number of ballots cast.
3. The determination of invalid ballots.

4. The facilities for candidates and their representatives to witness and verify the count and overall transparency.
5. Access by domestic and international observers.
6. Transport of polling station materials to constituency level.
7. Procedures at constituency level.
8. The conduct of electoral officers.
9. The collation and transmission of results information to constituency and higher levels.
10. The sealing, security and transportation of ballot boxes with used ballots, to constituency level.

## **PART B**

Questions that may be put:

### **BEFORE POLLING DAY**

1. Was the Voters' Register compiled in a satisfactory way? Were people missed out? If so, what remedial measures were in place? Were the names of dead people or "phantom voters" included? Were citizens denied registration on dubious grounds?
2. What difficulties have been experienced in registering to vote?
3. What problems have been encountered by parties in registering candidates?
4. Was the Register easily available for public scrutiny?
5. Did registered voters experience difficulty obtaining their Voters' Identity Cards or being included on the register?
6. Who are the election officials? How were they chosen? Are voters confident that they will be impartial?
7. Is the person in the street satisfied with arrangements? Will he/she vote? If not, is he/she afraid to do so? Were there any attempts to discourage/encourage the participation of women and were they effective?

8. Have all parties been able to campaign freely? Has the campaign been free of intimidation, etc? Have all parties had full access to the mass media?
9. Is there freedom to advertise and distribute posters, leaflets, etc?

#### **ON POLLING DAY**

1. Before polling starts, are the ballot boxes empty? Are they properly sealed? Are all procedures being adhered to?
2. Are all parties represented at polling stations? Are they satisfied with the process?
3. Are voters apparently voting freely? Are they enthusiastic? Do they talk freely? Do they exhibit signs of fear or intimidation?
4. Do voters and election officials understand the procedures properly? If not, are the procedures being explained fully and impartially? Are attempts being made to suggest how voters should vote?
5. Does the turnout indicate that women have been deterred from voting?
6. Is only one person at a time being allowed into the voting booth?
7. How long are voters waiting to vote? If a long time, are some being put off? Is there queue jumping?
8. Will all parties be represented at polling centres throughout voting and count? Are party polling agents adequately trained and vigilant?
9. Will foreign observers have free access to all stages of the process?
10. Is the security presence effective/oppressive?

#### **THE COUNT**

1. Are the boxes kept safe until opened? Are all parties present at opening?
2. Does the number of used ballot papers tally with the record of those who voted?

3. Are the papers counted properly? Are counting agents present? Are they satisfied with the procedure of the count? Is the collation and transmission of results being carried out properly?
4. What happens to the unused ballots?
5. What are the procedures at the constituency level?
6. Observe the collation of polling station returns.



Cameroon Parliamentary Election, 1997

# Commonwealth Observer Group

## CHECKLIST FOR POLLING STATION VISITS

Name of Observer(s):.....

Constituency:.....

Polling Station:.....

Time of Arrival:.....

Time of Departure:.....

Voters in Queue:.....Rate of Processing.....

- |    |  |                               |                                |             |
|----|--|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------|
| 1. | Opening of Poll:                       | On time?<br>No/Yes<br>Details | Procedures followed?<br>No/Yes |             |
| 2. | Layout and<br>Facilities:              | Good?                         | Adequate?                      | Poor?       |
| 3. | Polling Staff:                         | Efficient?                    | Satisfactory?                  | Poor?       |
| 4. | Security Presence:                     | Discreet?                     | Intrusive?                     | Oppressive? |
| 5. | Complaints by Party<br>Polling Agents: | No/Yes                        | Details:                       |             |
| 6. | Complaints by<br>Voters:               | No/Yes                        | Details:                       |             |

7.	Presence of Unauthorised persons:	No/Yes	Details:	
8.	Atmosphere at Station	Orderly	Tense?	Chaotic?
9.	Secrecy of Ballot:	Assured?	Poor?	Uncertain?
10.	<b>Voting</b>			
	(a) Personation attempts alleged:			No/Yes
	Details:			
	(b) Multiple voting attempts alleged:			No/Yes
	Details:			
	(c) Women deterred from voting:			No/Yes
	Details:			
11.	Closing of Poll:	On time? Procedure followed?	Numbers still in queue?	Yes/No
12.	The Count:	Are procedures being observed?		Yes/No
13.	Apparent fairness overall:		Good?	Acceptable?
14.	Other Comments:			

**ANNEX VII****Interim Statement of 19 May 1997**

Cameroon Parliamentary Election, 1997

**Commonwealth Observer Group***News Release*

19 May 1997

**Interim Statement by the Hon Jean-Jacques Blais PC QC,  
Chairman of the Commonwealth Observer Group**

The Commonwealth Observer Group arrived in the Republic of Cameroon on 8 May 1997. The Group consists of twelve members drawn from the ranks of experienced parliamentarians, electoral officials and eminent persons from across the Commonwealth, supported by a team of nine staff from the Commonwealth Secretariat in London.

In the week leading up to the national elections, the Group was thoroughly briefed by representatives of the Ministry of Territorial Administration, the governing party and opposition parties, the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms, Cameroonian professional associations and non-governmental organisations, and individuals with an interest in the political process. On 13 and 14 May our observers deployed throughout Cameroon to every province where they again met with regional governmental and political representatives. We have liaised closely with observers from other organisations, notably from La Francophonie.

On election day, members of our Group visited 350 polling stations across the country. Our teams observed the opening of the polls, the casting of votes, the closure of the polls, the counting of ballots at polling stations and the despatch of Counting Returns (Procès Verbaux) to Divisional Supervisory Commissions.

Utilising our own resources, we have been unrestricted in our ability to move around the country. Our conclusions are entirely our own.

We acknowledge the steps being taken by the Government of Cameroon to develop multiparty democracy in this country, and we recognise the importance of this election in that regard.

The holding of multiparty elections for the 180 seats in the National Assembly is a major undertaking. It requires skilled planning and administration, as well as the establishment of a viable legal framework. It also requires co-operation and co-ordination amongst all the interested parties. We recognise the progress that has been made by the Government of Cameroon in satisfying these requirements, although more needs to be done before the next phase of the electoral process.

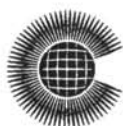
We received many representations critical of the preparations for the 17 May poll, especially in regard to the registration process; other problems in the conduct of the election were also apparent to us. However, our observation of the actual polling substantiated our faith in the commitment of the people of Cameroon to the democratic process.

At the time of this statement, results of the election have not been announced. While we also recognise that measures have been taken to enhance the consensual basis of the electoral process, we are concerned that the framework which allows a maximum period of 20 days for the final declaration of the polls entails much delay, and may undermine the confidence of the electorate. We will continue to monitor the situation until the results of the elections are finally proclaimed by the Supreme Court.

Our final Report will benefit from further widespread consultations and careful analysis. It will be submitted in the first instance to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, who will then transmit copies to the Government of Cameroon and the political parties participating in the elections.

The final Report will contain a number of specific observations and recommendations aimed at helping Cameroon in the further development of its evolving democracy, including the creation of an independent electoral commission.

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*ANNEX VIII***Departure Statement of 22 May 1997**

Cameroon Parliamentary Election, 1997

**Commonwealth Observer Group***News Release***22 May 1997****Departure Statement by the Hon Jean-Jacques Blais PC QC,  
Chairman of the Commonwealth Observer Group**


It is usual for Commonwealth Observer teams to issue a statement on departure. However, in issuing this statement, we wish to underline that given the specific circumstances surrounding the Cameroon Parliamentary election held on 17 May 1997, some observers will be remaining here until the process has been completed.


The Commonwealth Observer Group wishes to express its gratitude to the Government and people of Cameroon for their hospitality and co-operation during our mission in Cameroon. We are happy to have been given the opportunity to be present during this important phase in the evolution of multiparty democracy in Cameroon, and for the first general election since Cameroon joined the Commonwealth. We look forward to more of such co-operation.

Our 21-member Group arrived on 8 May, and we leave today, 22 May. During our stay in Cameroon, we met with a wide range of citizens, officials and party representatives. On election day we visited 350 polling stations all over the country and observed all aspects of the poll. We issued an Interim Statement on 19 May, and our final report will be submitted to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Chief Emeka Anyaoku, who will make it available to the Government of Cameroon, all the political parties which participated in the election, as well as the general public.


## ANNEX IX


## Sample Ballot Papers


REPUBLIQUE DU CAMEROUN ELECTIONS LEGISLATIVES DU 17 MAI 1997 CIRCONSCRIPTION ELECTORALE <b>BENOUÉ</b> <b>BENOUÉ-EST</b>  <b>A.N.D.P.</b> TITULAIRES SUBSTANTIVE		REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS OF 17 MAY 1997 ELECTORAL DISTRICT <b>BENOUÉ</b> <b>BENOUÉ-EST</b>  <b>N.A.D.P.</b> SUPPLEANTS ALTERNATE
1 <b>DOUBOULNE Nicolas</b> 2 <b>HAMADOU ISSA</b>		1 <b>SOUDI SANSAR</b> 2 <b>WANE Jonas</b>

REPUBLIQUE DU CAMEROUN ELECTIONS LEGISLATIVES DU 17 MAI 1997 CIRCONSCRIPTION ELECTORALE <b>BENOUÉ</b> <b>BENOUÉ-EST</b>  <b>S.D.F.</b> TITULAIRES SUBSTANTIVE		REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS OF 17 MAY 1997 ELECTORAL DISTRICT <b>BENOUÉ</b> <b>BENOUÉ-EST</b>  <b>S.D.F.</b> SUPPLEANTS ALTERNATE
1 <b>AHMADOU BAREL</b> 2 <b>NOJAH DJAMBELE Victorine</b>		1 <b>SAIDOU MAMDOUDU</b> 2 <b>FOKWA Humphred KUCHAMBI</b>

REPUBLIQUE DU CAMEROUN ELECTIONS LEGISLATIVES DU 17 MAI 1997 CIRCONSCRIPTION ELECTORALE <b>BENOUÉ</b> <b>BENOUÉ-EST</b>  <b>R.D.P.C.</b> TITULAIRES SUBSTANTIVE		REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS OF 17 MAY 1997 ELECTORAL DISTRICT <b>BENOUÉ</b> <b>BENOUÉ-EST</b>  <b>C.P.D.M.</b> SUPPLEANTS ALTERNATE
1 <b>PATHEALE Jean CLAUDE</b> 2 <b>SOULEYMANOU SALI</b>		1 <b>BENDAMJI Jean</b> 2 <b>MOHAMADOU LAMINOU</b>

REPUBLIQUE DU CAMEROUN ELECTIONS LEGISLATIVES DU 17 MAI 1997 CIRCONSCRIPTION ELECTORALE <b>BENOUÉ</b> <b>BENOUÉ-EST</b>  <b>U.D.C.</b> TITULAIRES SUBSTANTIVE		REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS OF 17 MAY 1997 ELECTORAL DISTRICT <b>BENOUÉ</b> <b>BENOUÉ-EST</b>  <b>C.D.U.</b> SUPPLEANTS ALTERNATE
1 <b>MADOUNDE WE</b> 2 <b>DJIBBO DJHDDA</b>		1 <b>Mlle MBADOUNDI</b> 2 <b>SALIOU BAHOURO</b>

REPUBLIQUE DU CAMEROUN ELECTIONS LEGISLATIVES DU 17 MAI 1997 CIRCONSCRIPTION ELECTORALE <b>BENOUÉ</b> <b>BENOUÉ-EST</b>  <b>M.D.R.</b> TITULAIRES SUBSTANTIVE		REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS OF 17 MAY 1997 ELECTORAL DISTRICT <b>BENOUÉ</b> <b>BENOUÉ-EAST</b>  <b>M.D.R.</b> SUPPLEANTS ALTERNATE
1 <b>DOUBNE DAMA</b> 2 <b>VAIDOU David</b>		1 <b>HAIRIGA ISSA</b> 2 <b>SIOUNG Valentin</b>

REPUBLIQUE DU CAMEROUN ELECTIONS LEGISLATIVES DU 17 MAI 1997 CIRCONSCRIPTION ELECTORALE <b>BENOUÉ</b> <b>BENOUÉ-EST</b>  <b>U.N.D.P.</b> TITULAIRES SUBSTANTIVE		REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS OF 17 MAY 1997 ELECTORAL DISTRICT <b>BENOUÉ</b> <b>BENOUÉ-EST</b>  <b>N.U.D.P.</b> SUPPLEANTS ALTERNATE
1 <b>BOUBAKARY</b> 2 <b>OUSMANOU AMAN SA'ALY</b>		1 <b>IBRAHIM KATCHACHA</b> 2 <b>Mme GAOUSSOUMOU née FAKAREPTI</b>

## ANNEX X

### The Count: Compilation and Proclamation of Results, 22-29 May 1997

The details of the process of compilation and proclamation of votes are to be found in Chapter 2 of the Observer Group Report. Our Group was informed by political party representatives and others during our pre-deployment briefings of concerns arising from the possibility of a 20-day delay between the close of poll and the final declaration of results by the Supreme Court. The Group referred to this delay and its impact on the process in our Interim Statement of 19 May 1997 (see *Annex VII*). In the Group's Departure Statement of 22 May it was stated that some members would remain in Cameroon to follow this phase of the process. Accordingly, this annex refers to the period from 22-29 May inclusive.

In the event, we were able to observe the verification and compilation of the reports of the Divisional Supervisory Commissions (DSCs) by the National Commission for the Final Counting of Votes (NCFCV), and the preparation of its report to the Supreme Court. As we left Yaoundé on 29 May 1997, a notice issued by the President of the Supreme Court, invited petitioners and MINAT officials to make their presentations concerning the parliamentary elections to the Supreme Court from 9 a.m. on Tuesday 3 June 1997. We were therefore unable to observe the Supreme Court in session. This notice allowed just four full days for the Supreme Court to rule on the challenges and reconcile the results before the end of the 20-day period.

It seemed clear that the administrative process had been interrupted by the three days of holiday which immediately followed polling day. Further, it appeared that some DSCs had particular difficulty in reconciling the polling station returns and preparing their reports. Consequently, as late as 27 May 1997, the Supreme Court was still receiving challenges and the reports from some DSCs had not yet reached the Commission. While we appreciated the discretion exercised by the Court in extending the period in which challenges would be received, we view this as a contributory factor to the uncertainty and tension which characterised the period following the poll and prior to our departure.

We observed the proceedings of the mixed NCFCV, which sat in the Library of the Supreme Court Building (*Palais de Justice*), from its inaugural session on Friday 23 May 1997. Membership of the Commission was constituted by an order of the Vice-Prime Minister responsible for Territorial Administration published on 16 May 1997. The allocation of the ten seats reserved to the political parties was undertaken by MINAT on the basis of three categories: parties with representation in the 1992-97 National Assembly; major political parties; and minor political parties. By this formula, one seat each was allocated to the CPDM, UNDP, SDF, MDR, UPC, *Alliance Nationale pour la Démocratie et le Progrès*, *Mouvement pour la Démocratie et le Progrès*, *Parti de l'Alliance Libérale*, *Union Pour la République* and *Démocratie Intégrale du Cameroun*. Although we had earlier heard concern expressed over the composition of the NCFCV and the discretion given to MINAT over which parties were to be represented on the Commission, only one query was raised with us by a minor political party not represented on the Commission as to MINAT's choice.

The Commission's sessions were open to the public and a number of candidates made use of the provision in the electoral law which allowed them to appear before the Commission to present their comments or claims in person. In order to expedite its work the Commission's members accepted a punishing work schedule. We were, however, struck by the fact that whilst the Commission was attempting to process the submissions it had received from the various DSCs, progress was slow-moving. This was for two reasons: firstly, the Commission, a new constitutional body, was attempting to establish its method of work; secondly, the process of examining the submissions from the DSCs was in itself a contentious process because of the fact that each party representative on the Commission would attempt to protect and promote their party's position. Nevertheless, once the Commission's method of work had been established,

we observed a remarkable level of co-operation between the Government's representatives and the representatives of the other political parties.

The substance of the reports of the DSCs reinforced our Group's earlier impression of distinct variations across the country in the interpretation and practical implementation of the law with regard to the administration of the elections. Some of these were of far greater significance than others. Many of the Group's observations on polling day were confirmed in the reports from the DSCs which we were able to hear being examined by the Commission. The reports from the DSCs in themselves varied in quality. Some had been correctly compiled; others indicated that the DSCs' mandate had not been well understood – in one case a DSC had decided to 'annul' the poll at a particular polling station, an act which was well beyond its remit.

We heard of serious irregularities in the conduct of the poll. One report was forwarded to the Commission with copies of seven challenges attached, including one each from the DSC and the Divisional Officer (DO). We heard the NCFCV question the actual existence of a particular polling station from which a counting report (*procès verbal*) had been received, as well as a number of instances where the numbers of votes tallied exceeded the number of electors on the register. The Commission's verification also uncovered transposed figures on the counting reports which when rectified impacted upon the final outcome of a seat.

We were informed on 23 May by officials of the Supreme Court that it had as of that date received 135 challenges arising from the parliamentary elections of 17 May. This figure later rose so that the final number of challenges accepted by the Supreme Court was 145. We were also kept informed by officials at MINAT as to the progress they were making on preparing their responses to these challenges. In the event, MINAT filed its documents on 26 May. However, there seemed little liaison between the Supreme Court and the NCFCV of a kind which would have for example allowed the Commission to examine in the first instance only those returns from seats/divisions which had no challenges against them.

However, the protracted nature of the process of verification allowed an extended period of public debate in the broadcast and print media as to the results of the elections, thereby justifying our earlier stated concern. On Saturday 24 May, the Commission published a statement asserting its independence, reminding the public that only the Supreme Court could proclaim the results of the elections, and cautioning against the continued disputation of the results in the public and private media. This followed a week of speculation and growing tension which had culminated in a press conference given by the Minister of Communications during which he claimed a CPDM victory based on an analysis of the 'official' counting reports.

The continuing Commonwealth observer presence for this stage of the process was well received by all concerned with the parliamentary elections. We regret that even as we left, the results of the elections were not yet known.

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