



**Peace Ambassadors -  
The Gambia**

## **PEACE AMBASSADORS-THE GAMBIA (PAG) ELECTIONS WATCH PROJECT 2021**

### **PAG Voter Registration Update #2 (5 June, 2021)**

Peace Ambassadors-The Gambia (PAG) is a voluntary non-profit peace education and advocacy organization operating in The Gambia, Senegal and Guinea Bissau. PAG non-partisan citizen observation effort for the 2021 voter registration to make the process more inclusive, transparent and accountable by enhancing participation, providing independent information on the quality of the process, and deterring potential problems.

#### **Summary**

Peace Ambassadors-The Gambia (PAG), beginning 29 May 2021, deployed 59 trained observers across the 7 Administrative Regions and 53 Constituencies of The Gambia to observe the voter registration process. This report serves as our second update and it covers the start or first phase of the voter registration exercise from Saturday, 29 May 2021 to Wednesday, 2 June, 2021.

Overall, reports from PAG observers from all 53 constituencies show that registration is progressing across the entire country and that registration officials are following most of the registration procedures. There have been challenges with the functioning of registration equipment such as printers and laptops which have caused the early closure of some centers, but these have not been widespread. It was indicated that security personnel and political parties agents are being deployed across the country to observe the process. Nevertheless, it was noted by PAG observers that registration staff appear to be inconsistently applying the registration procedures in some centers and security officials are likewise inconsistent in enforcing the COVID-19 regulations.

#### **Methodology**

PAG has deployed 59 total trained observers across the country including 6 regional coordinators – one per region with Banjul and Kanifing combined having one coordinator - and 53 constituency observers - one per constituency. PAG has deployed its observers in every constituency using two deployment methodologies: stationary and mobile observation. All 53 constituency observers were deployed as stationary observers for a total of nine (9) assigned days throughout the registration period from 29 May to 11 July, 2021 while all six (6) regional coordinators were deployed to observe on every day, throughout the registration period within their assigned regions where they are mobile, observing the general environment of the registration process and reporting critical incidents as they occur.

All 53 constituency observers were instructed to observe at a single registration center throughout the day on three specific days – Saturday, 29 May, Monday, 31 May and Wednesday, 2 June – in their assigned constituencies. On each observation day, every observer sent in four observation reports based on a comprehensive checklist via coded text message using their mobile phones to the PAG’s reporting database. These 53 constituency observers have been assigned based on the IEC 2021 Movement Plan according to the availability of IEC officials at registration centers within the constituencies. All PAG observers were accredited by the IEC and permitted to observe.

## **Findings**

This PAG report provides comprehensive information on reports from all PAG observers during the first phase of the voter registration observation (29 May to 2 June). All 53 constituency observers submitted reports each of the three days during the first reporting phase reflecting their observation at 119 unique registration centers. Due to the small number of registration centers in some constituencies, some observers reported from the same center on multiple days.

## **Opening**

Of the total of 159 reports received by observers during this phase, 142 reports constituting 89% indicated that their observed center opened on time, that is, between 8:00 to 8:30 am with the remaining 17 constituting only 11% opening after 8:30am.

- ▶ Saturday, 29 May – 40 of 53 observed registration centers opened between 8-8:30am;
- ▶ Monday, 31 May – 50 of 53 observed registration centers opened between 8-8:30am; and
- ▶ Wednesday, 2 June – 52 of 53 observed registration centers opened between 8-8:30am.

## **Setup**

Generally, during phase 1, PAG observers reported that many centers that opened had the staff and materials required and remained open throughout the day.

For example,

- ▶ 128 of 159 observer reports show that centers were accessible by all registrants while 31 of 159 reports show that centers were not accessible, for example, applicants were required to go upstairs to register – which potentially poses a problem for some persons with disabilities.
- ▶ 151 of 159 observer reports show that registration centers were identifiable and clearly marked by signs;
- ▶ 129 of 159 observer reports show that IEC registration centers had at least four registration staff present when the center was opened, an average of 37;

- ▶ 133 of the 159 observer reports indicate that registration centers had at least 2 female registration staff; and
- ▶ 156 of 159 observer reports indicate that registration centers had all the critical registration materials present.

## **COVID 19 Safety Measures**

The IEC in its 2021 voters registration training manual included the implementation of the COVID 19 safety guidelines as provided by the Ministry of Health of The Gambia and World Health Organization (WHO) at all registration centers.

For the total number of 159 reports received during phase one of the PAG reporting, registration centers had the following number of all of the required COVID-19 prevention materials such as hand wash buckets, soap, sanitizers and thermometer for registration applicants, staff and observers according to the following observation days:

- ▶ Saturday, 29 May – 29 of 53 registration centers had all required COVID-19 materials;
- ▶ Monday, 31 May – 35 of 53 registration centers had all required COVID-19 materials; and
- ▶ Wednesday, 2 June – 34 of 53 registration centers had all required COVID-19 materials.

Additionally, 124 of 159 observer reports show that the IEC officials wore face masks during the implementation of their duties while only 35 reports show that IEC officials did not wear the mask during the conduct of the process. In the same manner, the total of 46 of 159 observer reports reflect that security personnel always enforced the COVID-19 regulations at observed registration centers while 84 of 159 reports show that security present sometimes enforced the COVID-19 regulations of hand washing, temperature checks and social distancing during registration.

## **Registration Procedures**

Generally, PAG Observers reports indicated that registration officials followed most of the registration procedures such as requesting applicants to present a valid identification before being registered, having applicants affix their thumb print or signature to application forms to certify that their information were correct, the operator inputting the data of successful registrants, as well as giving priority to people requiring assistance such as pregnant women and persons with disabilities.

- ▶ 157 of 159 reports show that all or many registrants were asked to present a valid identification document (such as national ID card, birth certificate, Gambian Passport or an attestation) before being registered.

- ▶ 152 of 159 reports show that no applicant who presented a valid national identification document was denied to register.
- ▶ 157 of 159 reports show that applicants were asked to affix their thumbprint to the registration form to certify that their information was correct before being sent to the operator.
- ▶ 158 of 159 observer reports show that the operator input the data of all applicants into the laptop and their photos were taken.
- ▶ 143 of 159 PAG observer reports show that applicants requiring assistance such as pregnant women and persons with disabilities were given priority to register.

However, PAG observers also noted that some procedures were applied inconsistently across registration centers. For example:

- ▶ 49 of 159 reports reflect that IEC officials did not always ask registrants whether they had registered somewhere else. The above mentioned question was a major emphasis in the IEC training manual which is geared toward reducing the incident of multiple registration.
- ▶ Below are registration figures by procedures based on reports received by PAG observers:
- ▶ Only 122 of 159 reports show that the card issuer at registration centers presented all successful registrants with a voter card before allowing them to leave the center. 5 of 159 reports show that successful applicants did not receive their voter card after registration. In most cases, this was due to a malfunctioning card printer.
- ▶ 23 of 159 reports show that if the applicant was found to be ineligible, registration officials did not fill out the rejection form and the rejected applicant was not served a copy.
- ▶ 100 of 159 observers' reports show that many applicants who successfully registered presented only the attestation signed by the district Sefyo or Alkalo.

### **Security and Party Agents**

PAG observers reported many centers having uniformed security personnel and political party agents present to observe the process:

- ▶ 155 of 159 reports show that there were uniformed security personnel present at registration centers;
- ▶ 137 of 159 reports, political parties deployed at least 2 party agents to observe.

## **Closing**

Generally, observers reported that registration centers remained open throughout the day for the required time which is 5:00 pm. However, the malfunction of some critical registration equipment such as printers and laptops did require some observed centers to close down early.

For example:

- ▶ 96 of 159 observer reports indicated some type of equipment malfunction during the day. Most of these cases (53 ) were quickly resolved. However, 43 reports indicated that the malfunction caused serious delay of the registration process;
- ▶ Only 7 of 159 reports show that registration centers closed early due to malfunction of critical registration materials;

Also, for registration centers that remained open until 5:00 pm, not all reports show that applicants who were already in the queue were allowed to register. For example:

- ▶ 26 of 158 PAG observers reports show that applicants who were already in the queue before 5:00 pm were sent home by the IEC officials and informed to come back the next day. The IEC's training manual indicates that applicants in the queue at 5:00pm should be allowed to register that day.

PAG observers also witnessed instances of disruption, intimidation and harassment at some registration centers. For example:

- ▶ 13 of 158 reports show that registration centers had some level of disruption or attempt to disrupt the registration throughout the observation days; while
- ▶ In 16 of 158 reports show that there were instances of intimidation and harassment at registration centers.

## **Critical Incidents**

PAG observers were instructed to immediately report any serious problems that could compromise the conduct of the voter registration exercise. During the first phase of the observation PAG received 116 Critical Incidents and confirmed 59 incidents. A vast majority of the critical incidents received were centered on early closure of registration centers or delay in registration process due to malfunction of critical registration materials such as laptops, printers, generators, etc.

Other critical incidents of note reported by PAG observers include:

- ▶ Turning away of registrants by IEC officials even when they were in the queue before 5:00 pm;

- ▶ Registrants opposing that priority be given to people with special needs as well as disabilities; and
- ▶ The attempt of underaged registrants to register using the Sayfo and Alkalo attestation.

### **Interim Recommendations**

Again, Overall, reports from PAG observers from all 53 constituencies show that registration is progressing across the entire country and that registration officials are following most of the registration procedures. There have been challenges with the functioning of registration equipment such as printers and laptops which have caused the early closure of some centers, but these have not been widespread. It has been observed that security personnel and political parties agents are being deployed across the country to observe the process. Nevertheless, it was noted by PAG observers that registration staff appear to be inconsistently applying the registration procedures in some centers and security officials are likewise inconsistent in enforcing the COVID-19 regulations.

PAG in this regard, offers the following recommendations to help enhance the quality of the registration process:

## **To the IEC**

- PAG extends commendation to the IEC for the timely opening of the registration centers as well as the availability of registration officials to conduct the registration process;
- Encourages the IEC to employ concrete measures to address the issues of faulty registration equipment at registration centers in order to ensure that eligible Gambians can registered in stipulated timeframe for the voter registration;
- Cautions the IEC registration staff to evenly apply the procedures and guidelines stipulated for the registration process that is in conformity with the electoral legal framework.

## **To Security Services**

- PAG encourages security personnel to consistently enforce the COVID-19 regulations at various registration centers assigned in order to ensure that the general public is protected during the conduct of this voter registration exercise.
- Security services such as immigration and police should remain vigilant in the conduct of their services so as to keep an eye on illegal registration as well as speedily intervene during instances of violence and disruption.

## **To Political Parties**

- ▶ Admonish all political parties to adhere to the IEC regulation stipulated in its recent public statement to have only one political party agent per center and that all parties should adhere to guidelines employed by IEC officials at registration centers.
- ▶ Encourage party supporters to stop spreading false information, hate speech and violent actions during this period.

## **To All Stakeholders**

- ▶ Expand efforts to inform the public that if they want to vote in 2021 they must register in 2021; and
- ▶ Remember that PAG is committed to continuing to observe the registration process. As such, a more comprehensive report with detailed observation findings and recommendations will be issued at the end of the exercise.

## **About the PAG and Observation of the 2021 Voter Registration Process**

Peace Ambassadors-The Gambia (PAG) is a voluntary non-profit peace education and advocacy organization operating in The Gambia, Senegal and Guinea Bissau. Since its inception in 2001, Peace Education and Conflict Resolution has served as the basis of the organization's existence. We incorporate other core issues such as youth empowerment, civic education and election

observation. These core issues are made possible through capacity building and awareness creation.

Peace Ambassadors - The Gambia has since 2006 monitored every election held in The Gambia including presidential, parliamentary and local government elections. The organization also conducts voter education to ensure the public is educated on the conduct of the elections in all aspects. This is the organization's commitment to ensure peace and stability in the country.

Peace Ambassadors-The Gambia (PAG) non-partisan citizen observation effort for the 2021 voter registration to make the process more inclusive, transparent and accountable by enhancing participation, providing independent information on the quality of the process, and deterring potential problems. PAG 2021 observation efforts are conducted in partnership with the National Democratic Institute (NDI), providing technical support and financed by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

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***Thank you for your kind consideration as we all work to advance the democracy of The Gambia!!!***