

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

2022 National Assembly Elections Mid-Day Statement

9th April 2022

The Elections Watch Committee is a partnership of 3 organizations with different expertise and background – Peace Ambassadors - The Gambia (PAG), ACTIVISTA and the National Youth Parliament (NYP) – collaborating to observe the electoral processes in The Gambia. The EWC’s observation of the 2022 National Assembly elections builds on the EWC’s observation of the 2021 Presidential election processes such as the Voter Registration, the display of provisional list of voters, the candidate nomination, the campaign period and the 2021 presidential election day. Prior to the 9th April National Assembly election day, the EWC had observed the candidate nomination process and campaign period; the EWC is now observing the election day processes at polling stations/streams as well as within all constituencies.

Introduction

This midday update is based on reports that the Elections Watch Committee (EWC) has received from 300 out of 300 stationary observers deployed to polling streams proportionally nationwide as of 12:00pm on 9th April 2022.

On 9th April, the EWC deployed 410 trained and accredited election day observers. This includes 300 stationary polling stream observers, 50 mobile observers, 53 constituency supervisors, and 7 regional coordinators. The 300 polling stream observers have been systematically deployed based on a proportional distribution by constituency. This means that the proportion of Elections Watch stationary observers closely matches the overall proportion of the IEC polling streams in each constituency and administrative area. This proportional deployment enables the EWC to comment on the process nationally, drawing on data points from every constituency across the country. Appendix A provides a breakdown of the distribution of observed polling streams by administrative area. In addition, the EWC will deploy observers to the IEC collation centers to observe these processes.

This report focuses on the set-up and opening of polling stations and streams. Percentages reported reflect percentages of polling streams observed which provides credible data on emerging national trends. At this time, the EWC has received 100% of reports from its 300 stationary observers.

Arrival at Polling Streams

- By 7:00am, 100% of Elections Watch Observers were at their assigned polling streams. The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) staff respected all Elections Watch Observers’ status as an accredited observer and permitted them to observe at polling stations.

Set-up

- Elections Watch Observers reported that in all polling streams observed there were at least 3 staff present during set-up. 70% of polling streams had at least two staff members that were women. Only 22% of EWC observers indicated a female Presiding Officer.
- Observers reported that all essential materials (including the voters list, ballot drums, ballot drum seals, ballot tokens, and indelible ink) were available at all observed polling streams at the time of opening which reflects the good logistical preparation of IEC ahead of election day.
- In all polling streams where Elections Watch observed, the ballot drums were shown to be empty and the ballot drums were properly sealed.
- Observers reported that in 23% of polling streams the Presiding Officer did not count the number of ballot tokens at the polling stream before opening the process for voting. EWC observers witnessed three instances where party agents demanding the counting ballot tokens delayed the start of the voting process. The Elections Watch Committee notes that the IEC Handbook advises Polling Officials to count the ballot tokens after they receive their materials, which occurs the day before the election. Though counting the ballot tokens at the polling station is not required, doing so in the future would increase the transparency of the voting process.
- Elections Watch observers in 32% of polling streams noted that they had to climb stairs to reach the polling stream. Stairs make the polling station inaccessible to persons with disabilities and the elderly which may disenfranchise them from voting.
- In 99% of polling streams where Elections Watch Observers are located, observers saw security personnel stationed. This is commendable compared to the low presence of security officials deployed during the campaign period.
- 98% of observed polling streams had at least one party agent present during the set-up process; 50% of polling streams observed had at least four parties present which demonstrates parties' interest and engagement in observing the voting process.

Opening Time

- Elections Watch Observers reported that voting generally commenced on time in most of the observed polling stations. By 8:15am, 93% of polling streams where Elections Watch Observers were assigned had opened. However, in three instances, opening was delayed due to requests from party agents to count the ballot tokens before opening. The remaining polling streams opened shortly thereafter, and all observed polling streams were open by 10:00am.

Critical Incidents

Generally, Elections Watch Observer reports indicated that the set-up and opening process has been peaceful, orderly, and proceeding smoothly across the country. The Elections Watch Committee recorded no serious critical incidents during the opening and set-up process.

As previously mentioned, the EWC received three reports of disagreements at polling stations due to insurances of party/candidate agents demanding that ballot tokens be counted at the polling station before voting starts. For example, at a polling station in Brikama, Kombo South, party agents representing GDP, NPP, UDP and an independent candidate demanded the count of the tokens before opening. This delayed the opening time by one hour. In another polling station in the Kanifing Administrative area, a UDP party agent again demanded the count of the ballot tokens before voting began. This delayed the start of the voting process. At another polling station located in Lower Nuimi, Kerewan, party agents demanded a count of the tokens delaying the opening for thirty minutes.

Other critical incidents received by the EWC included campaigning near polling stations. At a polling station in Banjul South, NPP supporters were seen campaigning at the NPP Political Bureau located opposite the polling station which was upsetting voters. IEC officials however, later ordered the closure of the bureau to restore calm. At another, an NPP vehicle was seen transporting elderly voters in the Kanifing Administrative area which resulted in tension but was later resolved by the intervention of military personnel.

Recommendations

- Political party agents should continue monitoring the process through closing and counting and refrain from campaigning on Election Day.
- EWC encourages all voters to turn out to exercise their franchise. All voters in the line at 5:00pm should be allowed to vote.
- The Security Command should ensure that their officers remain vigilant and continue to protect all voters and officials on election duty throughout the remainder of the process.
- Finally, EWC encourages the IEC to update its polling procedures to include the count of ballot tokens in the presence of observers and agents before opening as a way of increasing the transparency of the process.

About the Elections Watch Committee

The Elections Watch Committee is a partnership of 3 organizations and other network members with different expertise and background collaborating to observe elections in The Gambia. The Elections Watch Committee includes the Peace Ambassadors-The Gambia (PAG), ACTIVISTA and the National Youth Parliament (NYP). This Committee is the decision-making body on all matters relating to the 2021 Elections Watch Project. PAG serves as the Secretariat of the Committee. The Elections Watch Project is being financed with assistance from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and technical support from the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI).

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Appendix A: Distribution of Elections Watch Observers

Administrative Area	Distribution of IEC polling streams/stations		Distribution of Elections Watch Stationary Observers	
	# of polling streams	% of polling streams	# of EW observers	% of EW observers
Banjul	36	2.3%	7	2.3%
Basse	198	12.7%	37	12.3%
Brikama	533	34.3%	103	34.3%
Janjanbureh	212	13.6%	43	14.3%
Kanifing	276	17.7%	53	17.7%
Kerewan	196	12.6%	38	12.7%
Mansakonko	103	6.6%	19	6.3%
Total	1554	100%	300	100%