

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Elections Watch Committee (EWC)

**2022 Local Government By Election
Midday Statement**

(14th May 2022 at noon)

The Elections Watch Committee is a partnership of 3 organizations with different expertise and background – Peace Ambassadors - The Gambia (PAG), Activista The Gambia and the National Youth Parliament (NYP) – collaborating to observe the electoral processes in The Gambia. The EWC’s observation of the 2022 Local Government By-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 presidential election day. The EWC has equally observed the pre-election period which include candidate nomination and campaign as well as the April 2022 National Assembly election day processes. Ahead of the 14th May Local Government by-elections in the four wards, the EWC has observed the candidate nomination process and the campaign period. The EWC will deploy observers to observe the election day processes.

Introduction

This midday update is based on reports that the Elections Watch Committee (EWC) received from all 53 stationary observers deployed to polling streams proportionally in the wards concerned by the by-elections as of 12:00pm on May 14th, 2022.

On May 14th, the EWC deployed 59 trained and accredited observers. This includes 6 mobile observers and 53 stationary observers. The 53 stationary observers have been systematically deployed based on a proportional distribution by ward. This means that the proportion of polling streams observed by the EWC in each ward and region closely matches the overall percentage of polling streams in each ward and region. This proportional deployment enables the EWC to comment on the process drawing on data points from all the wards concerned across the country. In addition, the EWC will deploy observers to the collation centers to observe the collation process. Appendix A provides a breakdown of the distribution of observed polling streams by administrative area / ward.

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 trends. At this time, the EWC has received 100% of reports from its 53 stationary observers.

Arrival at Polling Streams

- By 7:00am, 100% of Elections Watch Observers were at their assigned polling streams. In all polling streams where Elections Watch observers are located, the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) staff respected the Elections Watch Observer's status as an accredited observer and permitted them to observe at the polling stream.

Set-up

- Elections Watch Observers reported that 92% of polling streams had at least 3 staff during set-up. 96% of polling streams had at least one staff member that was a woman however, 4% of observed polling streams had no women serving as polling officials
- 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 polling streams where Elections Watch observed, the ballot drums were shown to be empty and the ballot drums were properly sealed in a systematic manner.
- Observers reported that in 8% of polling streams the Presiding Officer did not count the number of ballot tokens at the polling stream before opening the process for voting. 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 19% of polling streams noted that they had to climb stairs to reach the polling stream. Stairs make the polling place inaccessible to persons with disabilities (PWDs) and the elderly which may disenfranchise them from voting.
- In all polling streams where Elections Watch Observers are located, observers saw security personnel stationed.
- 98% of observed polling streams had at least one party agent present during the set-up process 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, 91% of polling streams where Elections Watch Observers were assigned had opened. The remaining polling streams opened shortly thereafter, and all observed polling streams were open by 10:00am.

Critical Incidents

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

However, in one polling station within Marakissa ward, the observer witnessed an incident where the UDP Candidate and a number of NPP supporters engaged in an argument. EWC observer reported that the UDP candidate, after casting his vote, attempted to visit other polling streams and was stopped and asked to leave by the IEC officials. As he was leaving, he claimed that two NPP vehicles stationed within the voting center while transporting their supporters should be removed from the premises as well. This resulted in a heated argument that was effectively diffused.

In another incident in the Sanyang ward, EWC observer reported that an NPP supporter, after casting his vote, spoke to other voters in the queue and encouraged them to vote for his party. This also resulted in a heated argument between supporters of the different political parties present and was similarly effectively diffused.

Recommendations

- Political party agents to continue monitoring the process through closing and counting
- EWC encourages voters who are still waiting in line to vote to wait patiently and in an orderly manner 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.

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 / Ward	Distribution of IEC polling streams/stations		Distribution of Elections Watch Stationary Observers	
	# of polling streams	% of polling streams	# of EW observers	% of EW observers
Brikama – Marakisa Ward	28	26.2%	14	26.4%
Brikama – Sanyang Ward	58	54.2%	28	52.8%
Kanifing – Bundungka Kunda Ward	11	10.3%	6	11.3%
Kanifing – London Corner Ward	10	9.3%	5	9.4%
Total	107	100%	53	100%