



Elections Watch Committee (EWC)

**Local Government Elections (Councilor) 2023
Mid-Day Statement**

15th April 2023

The Election Watch Committee (EWC) is a partnership of 7 organizations with different expertise and background – Peace Ambassadors-The Gambia (PAG), ACTIVISTA, National Youth Parliament (NYP), Think Young Women (TYW), Beakanyang, Peace Hub – The Gambia (PHTG), and The Gambia Federation of the Disabled (GFD) – collaborating to observe the electoral processes in The Gambia. The EWC’s observation of the 2023 local government elections will build on the EWC’s observation of the 2021 Presidential election including the Voter Registration process, the display of a provisional list of voters, the candidate nomination and campaign period, the 2021 presidential election day and as well the 2022 National Assembly elections. Ahead of the April 15 local government (Councilor) elections, the EWC has observed the candidate nomination process and the campaign period.

Introduction

This midday update is based on reports that the Elections Watch Committee (EWC) received from the 104 stationary observers proportionally deployed to polling streams nationwide on the 15th of April 2023. Elections Watch Observer reports indicate 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 incident during the opening and set-up process.

The EWC has deployed 128 trained and accredited observers, which include 104 stationary polling stream observers, 10 mobile observers, and 14 regional coordinators. Stationary polling stream observers have been systematically deployed based on a proportional distribution by constituency. This means that the proportion of Elections Watch Committee stationary observers closely matches the overall proportion of the IEC polling streams in each constituency and administrative area. For example, 34% of polling streams where Elections Watch Committee observers are deployed are in Brikama and 34% of overall polling streams are in Brikama. This proportional deployment enables the EWC to comment on the process nationally, drawing on

data points from every constituency across the country. Additionally, the EWC will deploy its 14 regional coordinators to observe the collation process at the IEC's 7 regional collation centers.

This report focuses on findings submitted by EWC observers on the set-up and opening of polling streams on election day. The data reported in this report is based on data on emerging national trends from reports gathered directly from our observers at polling streams. The EWC has received 100% of reports from its 104 stationary observers.

Arrival at Polling Streams

- By 7:00 am, all of the 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 nearly all polling streams had at least 3 staff during set-up.
- Nearly all polling streams observed had at least one staff member that was a woman. Many polling streams observed had two or more staff members that were women.
- Observers reported that all essential materials (including the voter's 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 the election day.
- In polling streams where Elections Watch observed, the ballot drums were shown to be empty and the ballot drums were sealed in a systematic manner.
- Observers reported that in nearly all polling streams observed the Presiding Officer counted the number of ballot tokens at the polling stream before opening 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.
- Some Elections Watch observers noted that they had to climb stairs to reach the polling stream. Stairs make the polling place inaccessible to persons with disabilities and the elderly which may disenfranchise them from voting.
- In nearly all polling streams where Elections Watch Observers are located, observers saw security personnel stationed during the setup process.
- In 100% of observed polling streams, there was at least one party agent present during the set-up process; about half of the polling streams observed had at least three party agents 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 streams. By 8:15 am most polling streams with Elections Watch Observers were reported to open. The remaining polling streams opened between 8:15 and 10:00 am.

Recommendations

- Political party agents continue monitoring the process through voting, closing, and counting in a peaceful manner.
- 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 5:00 pm 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.

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%	3	2.9%
Basse	198	12.7%	11	10.6%
Brikama	533	34.3%	36	34.6%
Janjanbureh	212	13.6%	17	16.3%
Kanifing	276	17.8%	17	16.3%
Kerewan	196	12.6%	13	12.5%
Mansakonko	103	6.6%	7	6.7%
Total	1554	100%	104	100%

About the Elections Watch Committee

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CONTACT INFORMATION-EWC's SECRETARIAT:

Yankuba Manjang, Coordinator – 3914415 / 7175382

Momodou Juju Jallow, Program Manager – 3438623 / 6429925

Sabel Betts, Communication Officer – 2552662

Website: www.peaceambassadors.gm

Facebook: Elections Watch Committee 220

Twitter- Electionwatch22

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