

PRESS RELEASE: International Observers' Statement on the Somaliland Local Elections – 03/12/2012

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<http://www.somalilandfocus.org.uk/>

December 3rd 2012 – International election observers congratulate Somaliland on a largely peaceful and transparent expression of democratic will in local elections—but concerned at weaknesses in safeguards against multiple voting

The team of 50 observers from 17 countries was assembled by Progressio, DPU and Somaliland Focus (UK) to observe Somaliland's local council elections on November 28th, 2012. It follows similar missions to previous local and national level elections in 2002, 2005 and 2010.

The mission congratulates the people of Somaliland and the National Electoral Commission (NEC) for efforts to conduct and participate in the elections, which saw 2,368 candidates contest 379 positions across Somaliland's six regions.

With the tabulation of final results still underway, it is not yet appropriate to provide an overall assessment of the election. A small team will remain in Somaliland to observe post-poll processes, including the declaration of results and the work of the Registration and Approval Committee (RAC) in determining which three political parties go forward to contest national elections for the next decade. A further statement will follow the declaration of results, and our final report will be published in mid-2013.

At this stage, we can cautiously report many positives. Election campaigning appears to have been competitive and pluralistic, with seven different parties and associations fielding candidates. Parties and associations generally respected the requirement to campaign on a specific day in the week, and to desist from public campaigning in the second and third weeks of the campaign.

With the lowering of the age of candidacy we welcome the unprecedented numbers of youth and women candidates. While in 2002 only five women contested local elections, approximately 140 did so in 2012. As for election day, most polling station procedures and staff were evaluated positively by observers. Where problems occurred, the NEC usually addressed them quickly and effectively.

However, we must also report some concerns. The most serious problems stemmed from the absence of a voter registry and weaknesses in related safeguards—primarily the inadequacy of the indelible ink used on fingers of voters—made polling vulnerable to multiple voting. In advance of the next elections, we recommend that Somaliland adopt a robust system for voter/citizen registration, in order to deter fraud and improve confidence in the electoral process.

We are also concerned about the understanding of the parties and the electorate of the implementation of the formula in Law 14, Article 6, which will determine which of the contesting parties and associations become registered parties. While we welcome the agreement prior to the election to adopt a code of conduct in the interpretation of the law, we encourage both the NEC and the RAC to continue to work transparently in the district and regional tabulation process and declare results in a timely fashion.

Dr. Steve Kibble, the mission's joint co-ordinator, said: "We will be putting forward to the NEC our proposals to address the concerns we have highlighted and look forward to continued fruitful cooperation with them. We will continue to track the electoral process and trust it reaches a speedy resolution that reflects the will of the Somaliland people."

Notes to Editors

1. For further information or to arrange an interview with a member of the coordination team, please contact Conrad Heine on +252 2 486 5255 / media@somalilandfocus.org.uk, or in London Lucy Jenkinson on 020 7326 2011 / lucyj@progressio.org.uk, or Tim Aldred on 020 7326 2003 / tim@progressio.org.uk.
2. Somaliland declared unilateral independence from Somalia in 1991 following the collapse of Somalia's government. It remains internationally unrecognised.
3. The joint mission follows on from similar missions to observe Somaliland's inaugural local elections in 2002, followed by the parliamentary elections in 2005, judged by observers as "basically free and fair", and the presidential election in 2010, which saw an orderly transfer of power and was judged "a peaceful expression of popular will".
<http://www.progressio.org.uk/sites/default/files/Somaliland-elections-2010-report.pdf>
4. The mission has been invited by Somaliland's National Electoral Commission (NEC), and funded by Britain's Department for International Development (DFID). It will follow up with a post-poll interim report to the NEC and donors, with the final report to follow in early 2013.
5. A pre-election assessment of the conditions for the local elections took place in 2012 and can be viewed here:
<http://www.progressio.org.uk/sites/progressio.org.uk/files/Preparing-for-local-elections-Sld-2012.pdf>
6. For more information about Progressio, please see www.progressio.org.uk and about Somaliland Focus, see www.somalilandfocus.org.uk