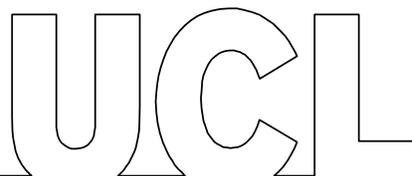


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Development Planning Unit

November 29th 2012

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For immediate release

First thoughts of international election observation team assembled by Progressio, DPU and Somaliland Focus (UK) for Somaliland's local council elections on November 28th

The team of 50 observers from 18 countries observed voting at 20% of the more than 1,700 polling stations, visiting 15 of the 21 districts across the country where the election took place, and followed up by witnessing station counts through the evening. Team members are continuing to observe counting and tabulation ahead of final results.

The mission follows previous observations of elections in Somaliland in 2002, 2005 and 2010, which observers were able to judge free and fair. The 2010 presidential poll was especially notable for the peaceful and smooth transfer of power on the defeat of an incumbent.

This poll is especially significant in that it will shape Somaliland's political landscape by determining which three parties contest national elections for the next decade. With a fuller team assessment to come in early December, preliminary indications suggest that, despite some reports of violence, and no voting taking place in some disputed districts in the country's east, Somaliland's electorate has, once again, turned out with enthusiasm and in large numbers.

Particularly heartening has been wide participation by female voters, a boost in numbers of female candidates and, thanks to the lowering of the qualifying age, youthful candidates standing in significant numbers. However, at this interim stage, a few concerns have emerged, including, once again, apparent attempts at underage and multiple voting.

Observers have also reported excessive use of force by security forces outside polling stations in some areas; some poor organisation surrounding the electoral process, including delayed opening of polling stations; insufficient electoral materials; and technical problems with voter safeguards, such as the ink designed to prevent multiple voting.

Fuller consideration of these matters awaits our interim report. In the meantime, the team encourages Somaliland's National Electoral Commission to ensure a transparent and accurate tabulation process and declaration of final results. With the stakes so high, there is potential for post-poll disputes.

Steve Kibble, the mission's joint co-ordinator, said: "We commend the National Electoral Commission for ensuring that voting has gone ahead on November 28th as scheduled. Now we look forward to a peaceful conclusion to the process."

A press conference will be held at the Hotel Maan-Soor, Hargeisa on December 3rd at 9am

Notes to Editors

1. For further information or to arrange an interview with a member of the coordination team, please contact Conrad Heine in Somaliland 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 <http://www.progressio.org.uk/sites/default/files/Somaliland-elections-2010-report.pdf>, which saw an orderly transfer of power and was judged "a peaceful expression of popular will".
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.