

SOMALILAND PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION 2010

SOMALILAND: SONSAF post-election press release

30 June 2010

Somaliland Non-State Actors Forum (*SONSAF*), who deployed the Somaliland-wide non-partisan election observers reports that the 26 June 2010 Presidential election took place in a general peaceful and transparent environment. SONSAF observers believe that the election was fair, free and credible ensuring the respect of the will of the people of Somaliland.

SONSAF conducted the only coordinated Somaliland-wide non-partisan election observation effort for the 26 June 2010 Presidential election. SONSAF continues to consolidate observation reports from over 700 observers trained and accredited who were deployed to over 900 polling stations across the six regions of Somaliland on Election Day. Over 40% of the observers were women. SONSAF used a standardized observation forms identifying key features and procedures of the poll including opening, polling and closing and counting phases.

Observers remained in the polling stations throughout the day with the option to cover up to three polling stations located within the same vicinity. They reported to an established hierarchical communication chain (e.g.: observers to trainers and the later to the regional coordinators) under the overall coordination of the SONSAF Secretariat. The regional capitals are now acting as data collection centres and the SONSAF Secretariat in Hargeisa as the nation-wide data centre and analysis centre where the reports will be verified for quality and analyzed impartially according to standards for non-partisan election observation.

SONSAF expresses its most sincere gratitude and appreciation to all the volunteers who dedicated their time to improving the transparency of the election process. SONSAF would like also to extend it thanks to the election officials in the National Electoral Commission (NEC) and election stakeholders for their cooperation during this observation journey.

With the exception of isolated acts, SONSAF noted the Election Day process proceeded very peacefully and without any sign of intimidation. It was heartened by a high turnout of voter, included women although in one region the turn out appears to be lower. SONSAF deeply regrets the isolated act of

violence namely Kalabayd causing the loss of one NEC official and one member of the security forces.

Overall, the NEC administrated the elections in a competent and professional manner, overcoming significant technical and logistical challenges although the NEC admitted that 34 polling stations could not open due to the lack of secure environments. Party agents were present in the majority of observed polling stations.

The general political environment over Somaliland has been relatively calm on Election Day. Similarly, the election campaign was essentially peaceful and conducted with a fair respect of the Code of Conduct signed by the three political parties, although the Election Monitoring Committee reported some contained cases of violations of this code: misuse of public property by political parties, the involvement of civil servants in the campaign.

The newly voter registration law and the reformed electoral law provided an adequate basis and significant improvements from the past elections for the conduct of a genuine Presidential election conforms to globally accepted standards on democratic multiparty politics. The introduction of a new voter registration system establishing a nation-wide voters list and a biometric ID/voter cards for eligible citizens of Somaliland, despite some difficulties including cases of under-age voter registrations, represented a major milestone in the Presidential election in terms of legal, operational and financial challenges.

The provision of a permanent independent national electoral commission institutionalizing knowledge and seeking comparative lessons together with the creation of national policies and standards on electoral conflict management (i.e.: Electoral Monitoring Committee, Mediation Panel, Media Monitoring Group) and the new format of the Code of Conduct for the political parties and the media marked significant improvements in the electoral legal framework of Somaliland.

As for the past elections, SONSAF notes that the implementation of the Election Monitoring Committee clearly demonstrated that the use of public property by political parties and the role of the civil servants for campaigning need to be better respected by the political parties.

Generally, the media ensured a neutral coverage of the main political campaign events. However, during the first two weeks, the Media Monitoring

Group and the Electoral Monitoring Committee reported that the Somaliland National Television (SLNTV) did not respect the code of conduct requesting the NEC to take disciplinary action as foreseen in the Code of Conduct.

On the day of the election, SONSAF observers reported that voters were free to express their will through secret ballot. Delivery of electoral materials had been well conducted, enabling a timely opening in the vast majority of the cases observed. During the early phase of the day, relatively large numbers of people turned out and there were long, orderly queues in many places. Polling stations were generally well organized, carefully and properly managed, staffed with the authorised NEC officials, secured (outside of the stations) by two police officers and manned by the three respective political party agents.

There were however problems in some areas such as: the identification of the exact polling station where a voter had to queue in the early hours of the polls observed in large polling centres in the urban areas and the dispute over some ballot boxes in Eastern Sanaag region. SONSAF observers reported that polling stations closed on time, with people waiting to vote being allowed to do so and that the count of ballots was rigorous.

SONSAF welcomes the changes that have been brought in the role of the political parties in the administration of the elections. Their presence in each polling station was generally effective. Observers reported that the count at the polling station followed the procedures although lengthy. The ability of the political party agents to receive a certified copy of the results at the polling station helped to provide transparency and accountability for this crucial aspect of the process and greater confidence in the outcome.

Overall, women remain under-represented in the electoral authorities, although their participation among polling station staff was higher than at other level of electoral stakeholders. SONSAF is pleased to have selected an estimated 40% women among his observers.

SONSAF remains committed to ensure that complaints filled by the political party agents will be dealt with fairly and openly and that any anomalous individual polling station results are looked into. SONSAF is cognisant that the tabulation process is still on going and a vital element of the process. SONSAF will publish a final detailed report of conclusions and recommendations at a later stage.

SONSAF requests all election stakeholders to learn from this election and apply those lessons to capitalize from this extended long electoral cycle to facilitating the improvement in most phases of future electoral processes, including the foreseeing local elections.

SONSAF was launched in August 2008 and is composed of Somaliland civil society, private sector and professional and academic institutions. Following its interest in organizing and mobilizing domestic election observers for the 2010 Presidential election, the European Commission and the Saferworld UK-Nairobi agreed to provide financial and technical support to SONSAF.

In May 2010, SONSAF signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Electoral Commission (NEC) paving the framework for the coordination between the two institutions during the development of the domestic election observation activities of the Presidential election.