



Mid-day Situational Statement on the Conduct of the 2022 Parliamentary Election Saturday, April 9, 2022

Delivered at the Metzy Residence Hotel, Gambia

Today, Saturday, April 9, 2022, Gambians are currently going to the polls to exercise their franchise as codified in Section 39 of the 1997 Constitution. Gambia Participates and its partners, Gambia Bar Association and the Transitional Justice Working Group deployed **411** trained and accredited election day observers (this is a revised number from the initial 415 due to 4 observers dropping); **65** mobile observers across the 7 regions and **53** constituencies of The Gambia to observe the election process and share reports on the conduct of the election. As noted in our pre-election statement, voter education campaigns have not been effective ahead of the parliamentary elections, the lack of which may contribute to the low voter turnout that was already observed across several polling units at the time of reporting.

This situational statement is based on verified observer reports on the opening and set-up of polling units and provides information on arrival of election materials, presence of polling officials, the presence of security personnel, presence of party agents, availability of essential election materials and accessibility of polling stations. This report also highlights critical incidents observed that may impact the integrity of the election.

Gambia Participates is leveraging a systematic election observation methodology to observe this election and the data provided in this statement is based on reports received from our polling unit observers in all the 53 constituencies as of the time of reporting.

Preliminary Findings

Gambia Participates have observed the following key issues during the opening and set up of polling stations across the country:

1. **The arrival of polling officials & opening of polling stations:** As of 7:30 am, Gambia Participates observers reported that IEC electoral officials were present in 98% of the polling stations.
2. **Commencement of voting:** Voting was underway in 26% of polling stations before 8:00am, and by 8:30am voting had begun in 100% of observed polling stations.
3. **Deployment of polling officials:** In those polling units where IEC officials and materials arrived, on average 4 polling officials were present in all the polling stations observed, 2 of which are women.

4. **Presence of security personnel:** 99% of polling stations observed had security agents present and 48% of these are women.
5. **Presence of party agents:** APRC polling or party agents were seen at 12% of polling stations, Citizens Alliance (CA) agents were seen at 15% of polling stations, GDC at 51% of polling stations, NPP polling agents were seen at 82% of polling stations, PDOIS agents were observed in 38% of polling stations, UDP were seen at 85% of polling stations, agents for independent candidates were seen at 76% polling stations and agents for other parties were seen at 24% of polling stations observed.
6. **Availability of essential election materials:** Ballot drums were observed in 100% of the polling stations. Indelible ink was observed in 99% of polling stations, and polling booths/voting compartments were observed in 94% of polling stations. A voters' roll was observed in 99% of polling stations, and duty certificates were observed in 43% of polling stations.
7. **Accessibility of polling stations:** 5% of polling stations observed were not placed in locations accessible to PWDs
8. **Electoral transparency:** The ballot drums were shown to be empty before being locked and sealed in 99% of polling stations. Also, at the commencement of polls, the presiding officer wrote down the number of security seals used on the ballot drums and allowed the party agents to write them down in 100% of polling stations.
9. **Secrecy of the ballots:** In 99% of polling stations, the voting compartment was set up in locations that allowed for voters to mark their ballots in secret. In 100% of polling stations observed, the ballot drums were well placed so that the voters can easily see the colour, photos and writing on the ballot drums.

Gambia Participates established a critical incident desk as part of its data centre to receive urgent reports from its observers. The following incident was reported to the incident desk:

- **Attempt to influence voters choice:** In Bakau constituency (polling unit: New Town Lower Basic School) when the NPP candidate came to vote, a man from the entourage attempted to influence two women to vote for the NPP candidate, but he was stopped by voters in the polling station. Later, the same man gave a young man money to distribute to voters to encourage them to vote for the NPP candidate.

As noted in our pre-election statement, voter turnout is expected to be low for today's election due to ineffective voter education and engagement before the elections and the religious observations of Ramadan and Lent. We still have 4 hours before the closing of the polls, thus, we call on citizens to use this rare opportunity and exercise their franchise under section 39 of the 1997 Constitution which is funded by their own money.

Preliminary Recommendations

1. The IEC should remain vigilant and independent in the results collation and announcement of election results without undue influence.
2. As the voting process is about to end in hours, the IEC must ensure that the ballots tokens are counted openly and that all polling stations have the results forms posted at the polling stations for the public to see.
3. The IEC should consistently publish certified election results, as they are announced, on their website and social media platform to increase transparency of the process.
4. We call on political parties, candidates and their supporters to adhere to the electoral codes and respect the decision of the majority.
5. To prevent the recurrence of the 2021 post-election chaos, we call on all stakeholders, especially candidates, parties and their followers to not use violent means to protest against election results.
6. Security agencies should ensure their personnel remain professional and non-partisan throughout the election process and avoid using excessive force to de-escalate tensions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Gambia Participates and its partners can confidently confirm that voting is underway across the country and that arrangements by the IEC to ensure a credible and transparent process are adequate across most polling stations observed.

Gambia Participates and its partners will continue to observe the process and will release additional findings as appropriate, through its social media platforms as the election progresses. We, therefore, call on the great citizens of The Gambia to continue to remain civil, peaceful, vigilant and law-abiding throughout the voting and counting processes. We call on voters who are yet to vote to kindly go to their polling stations and exercise their franchise.

Marr Nyang



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