



Preliminary Statement on the Conduct of the 2021 Presidential Election Monday, December 6 2021

Delivered at the Metzy Residence Hotel, Kololi

On Saturday, December 4, 2021, Gambia Participates, The Gambia Bar Association, University of The Gambia and the Transitional Justice Working Group deployed a total of 528 carefully selected, trained and accredited observers out of which 463 were stationary observers and 65 mobile observers to monitor the presidential election in all the 7 regions and 53 constituencies.

The 463 citizen observers deployed proportionally to polling stations and observed the processes of voting, counting and announcement of results. Additionally, 65 observers were mobile; they moved between polling stations in all the 53 constituencies to observe and report on irregularities that could potentially undermine the credibility of the elections within and outside of the polling stations. Thus, Gambia Participates observers were in every corner of the country, from Banjul to the remotest areas in Buduck. These are committed citizens who in addition to exercising their civic rights to vote, volunteered their time to ensure every vote counts by observing the election day process and helped to ensure Gambia Participates and her partners receive independent and non-biased information on the election day process.

The 2021 Presidential Election being the first election after 22 years of authoritarian rule enjoyed massive local and international support as well an unprecedented voter turnout of almost 90%.

This Preliminary Statement provides highlights of Gambia Participates findings regarding the conduct of the presidential election. It incorporates updates of some of the information made available to the public in the Mid-day statement released on Saturday, December 4, 2021, as noted in the mid-day statement, Gambia Participates observers were given access to observe every aspect of the electoral process. While we commend the IEC for providing opportunities for Gambians to participate in the polls, it must consider expanding the voter registration exercise and ease access to election information to the public.

This Preliminary Statement is based on reports Gambia Participates received from 463 stationary observers from every region and constituency. Preliminary analysis of the reports on voting, counting and announcement of results from every region and every constituency, shows that the December 4, 2021, presidential elections were generally conducted in accordance with the electoral laws and procedures of The Gambia. While there were some challenges, they were isolated and did not undermine the overall credibility of the process.

Summary of Election Day Findings

Voting

- In the vast majority of polling stations observed, persons with disabilities at **94%**, the elderly at **98%**, pregnant women, nursing mothers at **99%** and sick persons at **96%** were given priority to vote before others.
- In **98%** of polling stations observed, the voting compartment was set up in a manner that allows voters to mark their ballots in secret. In **99%** of polling stations observed, the ballot drums were well placed so that the voters could easily see the colour, photos and writing on the ballot drums.
- **8%** of polling stations observed were not set up in locations that are accessible to persons with disabilities.
- At **96%** of polling stations, Gambia Participates' observers reported that the polling officials conducted themselves professionally and in a non-partisan manner. In **96%** of polling stations, observers reported that the security agents had conducted themselves in a professional and non-partisan manner.
- At **100%** of polling stations observed, every potential voter was asked to show their voters ID before being allowed to vote.
- At **100%** of polling stations, polling officials checked every potential voter's fingers for indelible ink prior to voting. In **100%** of polling stations, indelible ink was applied to the cuticle of a finger of every voter before they were allowed to vote.
- At **98%** of polling units, voter details were systematically checked against the register of voters.
- There were no queues at 5:00pm in **52%** of polling stations. In **46%** of polling stations, everyone on the queue at 5:00pm was given an opportunity to vote. However, in **4%** of polling units people who joined the queue after 5:00pm were allowed to vote; these violations were mostly reported from the Central River Region (North) and Lower River Region.
- **31%** of polling stations completed voting before 5:00 pm, while **85%** completed by 5:30 pm, **10%** of polling stations completed voting at 6:30pm and **5%** of polling stations completed voting after 6:30pm.

Misconducts at polling stations

- The incidents of harassment and intimidation of voters or polling officials were recorded at **6% and 7%** of polling stations, respectively. In **6%** of polling units, women were particularly affected by incidents of intimidation, harassment or violence (this includes women as voters, polling officials, security, party agents or observers).

- In **3%** of polling stations, observers reported that party agents attempted to influence polling officials.
- People were seen canvassing for votes (asking people to vote for a particular candidate) in **5%** of polling stations. While these were reported from all the regions, reports of these irregularities were mostly received from Central River Region South at **8%** and Upper River Region at **7%**.
- In **15%** of polling stations, voters crowded the polling officials during voting.

Counting

- At **100%** of polling stations, polling officials arranged the tokens on the counting tray.
- At **100%** of polling stations, the Presiding Officer showed the filled counting tray to polling agents, domestic and international observers present during counting.
- Observers in **3%** of polling stations reported that there were incidents of harassment and intimidation of polling officials, party/candidate agents or observers during the counting of ballots tokens.
- In **10%** of polling stations, voters crowded the polling officials during the counting of ballot tokens.

Announcement and Posting of results

- At **53%** of polling stations, party agents for ESSA Mbye FAAL signed the official counting form. At **95%** a GDC polling agent signed the official counting form. At **99%** of polling stations, party agents for NPP signed the official counting form, at **21%** of polling stations NUP party agents signed the counting form, in **79%** party agents for PDOIS signed and in **99%** of the polling stations observed, the UDP party agents signed the official counting form, respectively.
- At **52%** of polling stations, the party agent for ESSA Mbye FAAL was given a copy of the official result. At **93%** a GDC polling agent was given a copy of the official result. At **96%** of polling stations, an NPP agent was given a copy of the official result, at **21%** of polling stations NUP party agent was given a copy of the official result, in **76%** PDIOS party representatives were given a copy of the official results form and in **97%** of the polling stations observed, UDP agents were given a copy of the official result, respectively.
- At **98%** of polling stations observed, the official results for the presidential election were posted in a visible place for the public to see.
- In **2%** of polling stations, no polling official was a woman, **29%** of polling stations had one woman polling official, **47%** of polling units had two women polling

officials. In **18%** of polling units, three of the polling officials were women. In **17%** of the polling stations, the presiding officers were women.

Critical Incidents

Critical incidents are electoral irregularities, whether intentional or inadvertent, that could undermine the integrity of the overall process if they were to occur at significant levels and rates. For the 463 observers, only 33 critical incident reports were received and verified.

The most frequently reported incidents were:

- **Voters were not allowed to vote because their names were not found on the voter roll;** Gambia Participates received reports from polling units where some voters with valid voters' ID were turned away from the polling stations and not allowed to vote because their names were not found in the voters' roll. In specific, a report was received from Half-Die (KGI) polling station with code 10101 where a voter whose ID has the name of the polling station on it, was not allowed to vote because his name was not found in the register.

Other incidents and order of occurrences were;

- Violence in and around the polling stations (**6**), interference by party agents (**2**), voting with ink already on the finger (**1**), voting without name being checked on the voter roll (**1**) and partisan security officials (**1**).

While these incidents are serious and must be addressed by IEC, they did not occur at levels and rates that would substantially undermine the integrity of the overall electoral process of the 2021 presidential election.

Recommendations:

To the National Assembly

1. National Assembly must prioritize legislation to have all elections conducted within the same period in order to reduce the cost of elections.
2. They should consider legislation that regulates the use of state resources during the electoral process (especially during political campaigns).
3. Incorporates key legal recommendations in the 2020 Elections Bill

The IEC

4. We call on the IEC to investigate concerns that voters' with valid ID cards are turned away from polling stations because their names were not found on the voters roll. The commission must, as a matter of importance, commence the

process of updating the voters' register to forestall the occurrence of such before the Parliamentary elections in April 2022.

5. The IEC should publish certified polling station-level results from the just concluded election on their website to increase the transparency of the elections.
6. The IEC should accredit observers at least two months before the legislative election to allow for the earlier deployment of long-term observers and to enhance the transparency of election preparations.
7. The IEC should reopen voter registration to allow citizens who attain the age of 18 on or before April 9, 2021 to be able to exercise their franchise.
8. In the spirit of electoral transparency, the IEC should also ensure the timely release of polling station lists to observer groups and other stakeholders to enable early planning.
9. The IEC must continue to ensure an inclusive process by making polling stations accessible to persons with disabilities. It should update and re-print (in color) the voting instructions located in each polling station so that the information is readable.

The Security

10. Security agencies should strengthen their impartiality and capacity to police polling stations, polling materials, electoral officers and voters.
11. Security agencies should maintain and expand the security protection to presidential candidates.

Political Parties

12. We call on the winning candidate to be magnanimous in victory and be president for all Gambians and not only those who elected him.
13. To those parties and candidates who did not succeed in this election, we call on them to be peaceful and remember that they have an important role to play to ensure peace reigns in The Gambia. If any candidate has any concerns over the conduct of the election, we call on them to resolve these issues peacefully through the proper legal channels.
14. All the candidates presented their manifestos to the citizens of The Gambia with the sole aim to develop the country and give Gambians and non-Gambians alike a quality public service delivery. These ideas and plans must not wait until opposition candidates are elected for them to be realized. Thus, we hereby call on the President-elect and the opposition candidates to synergize their feasible development plans for THE GAMBIA.

Conclusion

The 2021 presidential election no doubt has been highly competitive which is a mark of a healthy democracy as it helps to provide voters with alternatives, although in some sense it also polarizes the society. Now that this phase of the election is over, we all need to understand that there is more that unites us than divides us. We need to hold hands across political and ethnic divides and work for the common good of The Gambia. Gambia Participates call on all citizens, candidates and supporters to remain calm and peaceful, and reject any call for violence. The traditional and religious institutions should also use this political transition period to encourage their adherents to promote peace in The Gambia.

We want to thank the voters who went to the polling stations to exercise their franchise. The work has only begun, Gambians must make it a priority to hold those elected to account. Gambia Participates, Gambia Bar Association, Transitional Justice Working Group, and the University of The Gambia and its partners want to specially thank our many volunteers who served as observers for the election on behalf of the great people of the Gambia. Gambia Participates also appreciates the collaboration of our development partners IRI and Yiaga Africa to support Gambian initiatives to ensure credible elections in The Gambia.

Signed



Marr Nyang
Gambia Participates
Executive Director