



Pre-Election Statement 2023

Mayoral and Chairmanship Election





**Mid-day Situational Statement on the
2023 Mayoral and Chairmanship Election
Saturday, May 20, 2023**
Delivered at the Bakadaji Hotel, Kololi, Gambia

Introduction

For the Saturday, May 20, 2023, Mayoral and Chairmanship Elections, Gambia Participates deployed 154 trained and accredited stationary observers and 53 mobile observers to all the 53 constituencies in the Gambia to observe the voting and counting process as well as to share reports on the general conduct of the elections at the polling station level. The systematic deployment would allow Gambia Participates to provide timely and precise information on the conduct of the elections. The 53 roving observers are in all 53 constituencies in the Seven (7) regions of The Gambia to capture and report critical incidents occurring both within the vicinity of the constituencies and at polling stations.

As noted in the Gambia Participates pre-election statement, a total of 29 candidates from six (6) political parties are contesting in the election with only 2 female candidates in the contest. We commend the IEC for its effective management of election logistics across all the constituencies in the country resulting in the early commencement of polls.

Voter turnout during the early hours of today's election is relatively low, whilst voter education by stakeholders may not have been intense, the low voter turnout showed either voter fatigue in this electoral cycle or a lack of interest in the process and it presents a disturbing trend as this was also noticed in the April 2022 parliamentary elections. Elections remain important in establishing a political culture of democratic governance and active citizen participation.

Summary of Findings

Gambia Participates Mid-day statement is based on verified reports from 152 polling stations. Critical incident reports were received and processed within the same time frame. The statement provides data on the commencement of polls, availability of election materials and critical incidents that may impact the quality of the election.

1. **The arrival of polling officials and early commencement of polls:** As of 7:30 am, Gambia Participates observers reported that IEC Electoral officers were present in 97% of polling stations. Voting had commenced before 8:00 am in 20% of polling stations observed, by 8:30 am, all polling stations observed had commenced voting.
2. **Deployment of polling officials:** In those polling stations where IEC officials and materials arrived, the majority of the polling stations had four polling officials present, and at least of the polling officials present are female, on average.
3. **Presence of security personnel:** All polling stations observed had security agents present and 49% of these are women.
4. **Presence of Party Agents:** Party agents for Independent were sighted at 51% of polling stations, NPP polling agents were sighted at 99% and UDP at 97% of polling stations observed.
5. **Availability of essential election materials:** Ballot drums and indelible ink were observed in all polling stations. Polling booths/voting compartments were observed in 91% of polling stations. Voters' roll were observed in all polling stations, duty certificates were observed in 30% of polling stations and 34% of the polling stations observed are without improvised barriers.
6. **Accessibility of polling stations:** 18% of polling stations observed were not in locations that are accessible to persons with disabilities.

7. **Electoral transparency:** The ballot drums were shown to be empty before being locked and sealed in all polling stations observed. Also, at the commencement of polls, the presiding officer recorded the number of security seals used on the ballot drums and allowed the party agents to write them down across All of the observed polling stations.
8. **Secrecy of the ballots:** The voting compartment was set up in locations that allowed voters to mark their ballots in secret and the ballot drums were well placed so that the voters can easily see the colour, photos and writing on the ballot drums.

Critical Incidents

Gambia Participates received and verified the following critical incident reports:

1. **Intimidation and harassment of observer:** Our observer at Tallinding Dutokoto (Polling Code 20201) was harassed by voters, IEC Presiding Officer and a security official for documenting evidence of incidents unfolding at the polling station. The said Police Officer stationed at the polling station threatened and coerced the observer to get rid of the evidence she had collected. The observer had to leave the station for her own safety.
2. **Disruption of voting:** Party agents violently disrupted the voting process in the Senegambia polling station, this was triggered by the refusal of the IEC presiding officer to recount the ballot tokens for a second time before the commencement of voting. The IEC official eventually recounted the tokens and the process continued.
3. **Vote Buying:** An incident of vote buying involving agents for the NPP was reported at the July 22nd polling station in Banjul Central. The party agent was seen handing out money to voters. Observers also reported an incident of vote buying involving party agents for NPP in Bundunkga Kunda polling station in Kanifing, the agents were seen handing out cash to voters in exchange for their votes.
4. **Tension in the Polling Station:** At Campama Polling station in Banjul, our observer witnessed tension between members of the UDP and NPP which was later dissolved by security personnel.

In view of the foregoing, Gambia Participates makes the following preliminary recommendations:

1. We call on the IEC to ensure timely response to issues raised at the polling stations and proper oversight over the results collation process in a manner that will inspire public confidence in the outcome of the election.
2. As the voting process comes to an end, the IEC must ensure that ballots tokens are counted openly and that all polling stations have the results forms posted at the polling stations for the public.
3. We call on political parties, candidates and their supporters to refrain from acts that could jeopardise the conduct of the elections.
4. Security agencies should respond promptly to reports of voter intimidation and attacks at the polling stations, to accord citizens the opportunity to exercise the constitutional right to vote.
5. The security agencies should impose appropriate sanctions for any form of violation of the Electoral Act on Election Day, especially any threat to the right to vote or attempts to buy votes.
6. Security agencies should remain professional and non-partisan throughout the voting and results collation process.

In conclusion, Gambia Participates commend citizens for their peaceful conduct during the voting process. We call on voters who are yet to vote to kindly go to their polling stations and exercise their franchise, it is a rare opportunity to be part of the decision-making population. We urge the voters to remain patient and peaceful through the voting and counting process. The IEC will be announcing the official results at the end of the polls. The IEC is the legally mandated body to announce official results. We urge Gambians to refrain from sharing results that are not certified by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC).

Gambia Participates continues to observe the process to the end and will provide updates as the voting process comes to an end and the results collation commences.

Thank you and God Bless the people of The Gambia!

Marr Nyang



Executive Director
Gambia Participates



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by promoting good governance**