



PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

National Assembly Elections 29th September to 1st October 2011

Mahe, Seychelles

(SESEL)

I. INTRODUCTION

The Citizen Democracy Watch Seychelles (CDWS) is a newly registered non-governmental organisation in pursuance of article 24 of the Seychelles constitution, which states that citizens shall take part in public affairs, working locally and regionally in the areas of Democracy, Governance, Human Rights and Elections.

CDWS was accredited by the Electoral Commission to observe the National Assembly election of 29th September to 1st October 2011. This is historical as it is the first Domestic Observer Group to observe elections. CDWS acknowledges the associated recommendations made by local and international stakeholders and congratulates the Electoral Commission for taking this important step forward.

CDWS elected Mr. Steve Lalande as Chief Observer and in consultation with the Executive Committee was therefore mandated to form an Elections Observer Team which was then after individually accredited by the Electoral Commission. The citizens of this group come from all walks of life, including members from the Young Parliamentarians and live and work in the community, providing them with a unique perspective of the situation in Seychelles. At their swearing in, the Observers were reminded to uphold the principles enshrined in CDW's constitution, to abide by the code of conduct for election observers, to be

objective and impartial in their work, and through their activities not to express any bias or preference to any party. The Team formulated a strategy to observe the elections with twenty-six Seychellois observers deployed to all stations on Mahe, Praslin, La Digue, the inner and outer islands. Since CDWS was newly constituted, it demarcated its scope to observing the campaigning, cooling off and polling days.

II. Objectives of the Domestic Election Observer mission:

CDWS adopted the following objectives for the observer mission;

- 1) Assess whether the conditions existed for the conduct of elections that allow the Seychellois citizens to freely express their will.
- 2) Assess whether the Parliamentary election was conducted in accordance with the Constitution of Seychelles and the Election Act.
- 3) Determine whether the final results of the parliamentary election process as a whole reflect the wishes of the Citizens.
- 4) Assess whether the parliamentary elections met the recognised regional and international benchmarks.
- 5) Make recommendations to all stakeholders.

III. Consultation with Stakeholders:

To piece together the dynamics surrounding the elections, CDWS met with;

- political parties,
- the independent candidate,
- the police
- non-governmental organizations
- ordinary citizens on the street.

The dynamics of the elections were amongst other things impacted by the non contestation at the polls but an active advocacy by the opposition parties for either a passive participation or a “boycott” by the electorate. All parties favored a comprehensive and early review of the electoral laws and regulations that drives the electoral process. Political parties expressed an aspiration for a new era in the way politics is conducted across the islands.

IV. Concerns of Stakeholders:

The following concerns, inter alia, were expressed by the stakeholders:

- a) The need for comprehensive electoral reforms
- b) The need for comprehensive voter education.

- c) The sudden dissolution of the National Assembly.
- d) The use of state funds and resources during the elections period.
- e) Intimidation against candidates, activists and supporters.
- f) The media coverage of events during cooling off period.
- g) Not adhering to agreed rules and procedures during campaigning.
- h) Unavailability of party manifesto by some parties contesting the elections.
- i) Harassment and threats towards candidates and supporters.
- j) Inappropriate behaviour of political parties and activists on polling day.
- k) Difficulties to access campaign resources for independent candidates.
- l) Ambiguity related to the extent of dos and don'ts for political parties assisting voters access the polling station.

V. The Media:

The role of the media remains an area where stakeholder concerns remain high. For this election the media dutifully provided broadcast time through political party broadcasts. This provided candidates with the opportunity to pass on their message to the electorate. All candidates had SBC media access.

VI. Deployment Strategy:

CDWS did not limit itself to observing at the polling stations but also responded to requests to be on the field, within the districts, observing the behaviour of people travelling to and from the polling stations as well as the behaviour of people during the election period. A hotline was advertised in the newspaper and CDWS responded to several telephone calls from the public concerning activities happening in the districts. Although we located some suspicious looking groupings, our investigations did not reveal breaches of electoral laws. CDWS believes that its presence on the field may have contributed in some ways towards encouraging good faith on the part of the parties and also acted as a deterrent towards irregular practices.

VII. The Electoral Process:

Overall the electoral process was well managed, and in our opinion met regional and international standards. However some items of concern were observed and are functionally highlighted.

VIII. Pre-opening:

Party agents were present during the preparation phase prior to the opening of the polling stations. International and domestic observers were also present. It was noted that a total of 4 constituencies had posters within 200 meters of the polling station which is not in line with electoral laws.

IX. Opening procedures:

All stations opened on time except for a few on the outer islands. Security forces were adequately provided for all polling stations. Some minor procedural inconsistencies in the management of the ballots and the ballot boxes casted from special polling stations were observed. However this did not affect the integrity of the process.

X. Polling procedure:

The layout of the polling station facilitated easy flow. All the required materials were adequate. It was observed that the procedure used for applying the ink and checking under 'UV' light was not of a consistent standard across all stations.

XI. Secrecy and fairness of the ballot:

The procedure of voter identification was carried out as required, however a number of voters could not exercise their civic rights due to the fact that their identities could not be properly confirmed by the electoral officers and mostly because of names that do not appear on the voters register. This could have been due to the fact that not every voter had verified to ensure that their names were indeed on the register. It was observed that at some polling stations, the positioning of the polling booths coupled with the manner in which the ballot papers were folded, in addition with the possibility of seeing through the thickness of the paper by keen stationary observers may have placed the secrecy of the ballot paper at risk. In certain specific cases, the interaction between the voter with special needs and the accompanying witness added up to an indication that interference was being applied towards the sovereign decision making rights of the voter. However this remained isolated cases.

XII. Closing:

All voters who were in the queue at 7pm were able to cast their votes. It was noted that at one of the special polling station, four voters who came just at the closing were accommodated and thus able to exercise their civic rights. A group of 20 voters from North Island who arrived 45 minutes late after the polling station was closed were provided with the option of voting on the main polling day. It is noted that although the time allocated for voting was of public knowledge this incident caused frustration to the voters. At most of the polling stations both the candidate and party agent were present at the closing. The time set for counting was announced as required and in all cases, counting started within the hour of closing.

XIII. Tallying and Counting:

According to established procedure, only authorized personnel were allowed for the counting. The procedure for unsealing and emptying of ballot boxes was adhered to. The process of tallying and counting of ballot papers was well managed, although in a few cases contested discussion about some discrepancies could be observed between Election Officers, candidates and polling agents. All candidates and party agents expressed their consent through signature.

XIV. Conclusion:

- CDWS congratulates the Electoral Commission in effectively facilitating the whole process of the National Assembly election thus enabling citizens to express their rights to vote.
- Electoral officers and their teams have generally conducted the election to regional and international benchmarks.
- The visibility of the police and security forces enhanced the atmosphere of safety and encouraged peaceful assembly.
- The citizens have exercised their right and duty in a peaceful atmosphere.
- The CDWS considers the results of the National Assembly elections as the expression of the majority of Seychellois citizens that voted.
- Citizens of Seychelles are congratulated for maintaining a peaceful atmosphere.

XV. Recommendations:

- There be a strengthening of the voter registration system to allow alternative methods of voter verification.
- The Electoral Commission is urged to enhance public perception of transparency by releasing timely results of all vote counts.
- A comprehensive and early review of the Electoral Laws and regulations done in consultation with all actors and stakeholders.
- It is recommended that provisions are made for domestic observers to vote on a separate day to main polling day, so as to ensure a separation of civic duties to elections work.
- To respond to the wish of citizens to live in a peaceful and harmonious Seychelles, the Electoral Commission and other stakeholders are encouraged to increase and strengthen the development of educational programmes to impart civic education and to establish mechanisms to enhance inclusive dialogue, peaceful resolution of conflicts, tolerance of divergent views, a deeper and broader awareness of the electoral process and the strengthening of our democracy.

CDWS will be continuing its work throughout the electoral cycle and a final report will be released within 30 days.

On behalf of the Citizens Democracy Watch, I would like to thank all the support received from the Electoral Commission for the training of Observers, the general public which have overwhelmingly welcomed this initiative to also have people from their own land as observers, the international observers for their cooperation, the public sponsors, SBC and other media for exposing this noble cause to the citizens and the political parties and candidates for their trust in the principles of our work.

Mr. Steve Patrick Lalande

Chief Observer and Chairperson, Citizens Democracy Watch Seychelles

Victoria, Mahe, 3rd October 2011