The SADC Election Observation Mission (SEOM) was launched in Gaborone Friday October 10, 2014 by South African Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Hon. Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, in her capacity as the Representative of H.E. President Jacob G. Zuma, President of South Africa and Chairperson of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation.

The Minister said the SEOM is in Botswana at the invitation of its President H.E. Lt Gen Seretse Khama Ian Khama, to observe the General Elections scheduled for October 24, 2014. She applauded the Republic of Botswana as one the oldest democracies in the SADC Region and with a track record and contribution to building democratic institutions including holding of elections. She also expressed trust that this year’s election, being the 11th in this SADC Member State since the 1st multiparty elections of 1965, will be held in a transparent manner.

“It is our expectation that all leaders of this country will, as usual, continue to work together in Botswana’s national interest,” she said.

Hon Nkoana-Mashabane said SADC will deploy over 70 Observers across the various districts of Botswana who will be expected to consider the general conduct of the elections against the set principles that includes, amongst others, Full participation of citizens in the political process; Freedom of association; Political tolerance; Equal opportunity for all political parties to access the state media; Equal opportunity to exercise the right to vote and be voted for; Independence of the Judiciary and impartiality of the electoral institutions; Voter education and Acceptance and respect of the election results by political parties of the results as proclaimed to have been free and fair by the competent National Electoral Authorities in accordance with the law of the land. Any
challenge of the election results to be conducted as provided for in the law of the land.

The SEOM assessment will be informed by the guidelines conducive to an environment for free, fair and peaceful elections, namely, constitutional and legal guarantees of freedom and rights of the citizens, voters’ registration process; existence of an updated and accessible voters roll; location of polling stations in neutral places; and timeous announcement of the election date.

Addressing the SADC Election Observers soon after the launch, Hon. Nkoana-Mashabane thanked them for availing themselves to serve on the SEOM, which she said is an important mission whose objective is to strengthen democracy in our region.

She said SADC has its own processes and traditions to entrench the principles of democracy and good governance of which observing elections is a part. The primary guide is the SADC Treaty provides for adherence to the principles of human rights, democracy and the rule of law and to “consolidate, defend and maintain democracy, peace, security, and stability” in the region.

SEOM is guided by the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections and works in accordance with the African Union norms and standards.

For the observation of elections, SEOM is also guided by the legal frameworks in the respective country. In the case, of Botswana, they will also be guided by the Constitution of Republic of Botswana and Electoral Laws.

She urged the Observers work within the SADC frameworks and to commit to the stipulated discipline.

“Observers deployed will be expected to report on a daily basis on their engagements with political party candidates, civil society organisations, attendance of rallies, town hall meetings, public debates, and all other activities related to their functions as observers.”

These reports will be used by the Drafting Committee to compile the SEOM Preliminary Statement, which is expected to be released on October 26, 2014.