



**SADC ELECTORAL OBSERVATION MISSION TO
THE REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS
STATEMENT
BY
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OF
THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA
AND HEAD OF THE
SADC ELECTORAL OBSERVATION MISSION
TO THE 2014 NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS
IN THE
REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS,
DELIVERED ON 11 DECEMBER 2014**

Moka, Republic of Mauritius

Mr. Abdool Rahman, Electoral Commissioner,

Your Excellency, Dr Aminata Touré, Head of the African Union (AU)
Election Observation Mission,

Honourable Ellen Molekane, Deputy Minister of State Security of the
Republic of South Africa,

Ambassador Julius Tebello Metsing of the Kingdom of Lesotho, the
incoming Chairperson and

Ambassador Theresia Samaria of the Republic of Namibia, representing
outgoing Chairperson of the SADC Organ Troika, respectively,

Your Excellency, Ms. Emilie Mushobekwa, SADC Deputy Executive
Secretary,

Fellow Heads of International Electoral Observation Missions,

High Commissioners, Ambassadors, and other Members of the
Diplomatic Corps,

Esteemed Leaders of Political Parties and Independent Candidates,

Members of the Media and of Civil Society Organisations,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are gathered here this morning to share with you the preliminary findings of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Electoral Observation Mission (SEOM) to the National Assembly Elections in the Republic of Mauritius, held on 10 December 2014. We thank you for graciously honouring our invitation.

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year we have witnessed an unprecedented number of elections in the SADC region, in Malawi, South Africa, Mozambique, Botswana and Namibia. On Wednesday, 10 December, the people of Mauritius also participated in this festival of democracy. In January and February 2015, the Republic of Zambia and the Kingdom of Lesotho, will also go to the polls.

SADC attaches great importance to the holding of peaceful, transparent, free, fair, and credible elections in its Member States. The SEOM aims to assess the extent to which the Constitution, national electoral laws, and the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections, are adhered to during the entire electoral process, and to identify best practices in our Member States, for the purpose of improving the quality of our electoral processes.

The SEOM was deployed at the invitation of the Government of the Republic of Mauritius. His Excellency Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma, President of the Republic of South Africa and Chairperson of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation, in turn extended an invitation to Member States to constitute the SEOM.

Following the official constitution of the Mission, President Zuma appointed me, in my capacity as Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of the Republic of South Africa, to head this SEOM. Dr. Stergomena Lawrence Tax, the SADC Executive Secretary, was mandated to facilitate the deployment of the Observer Mission. The SEOM leadership comprises representatives of the Troika Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation, with Ambassador Julius Metsing representing Lesotho, the incoming Chairperson of the Organ, and Ambassador Theresia Samaria, representing Namibia, the outgoing Chairperson.

Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The SADC Electoral Advisory Council (SEAC), which also advised this Observer Mission, undertook a Goodwill and Pre-deployment Assessment Mission to Mauritius last month which confirmed that the environment was conducive to the holding of elections.

In fulfillment of its mandate, the SEOM deployed 82 Observers throughout Mauritius from 10 SADC Member States, constituted into 11

teams. The Mission observed pre-election events and preparations, including political rallies and media coverage of the elections.

Prior to the launch of our Mission, I met H.E. Monique Ohsan Bellepeau, the Acting President, Honourable Dr Arvin Boolell the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, and the Electoral Commissioner, following which the Observation Mission also met other political stakeholders. The consultations assisted the Mission to appreciate the context and political environment in which the elections were taking place.

During our consultations, a number of stakeholders raised concerns, *inter alia*:

- Perceived bias in the allocation of airtime by the National Broadcasting Corporation;
- Alleged utilisation of state resources by the ruling party;
- Questions around the secrecy of the ballot. Some stakeholders were unhappy with the counterfoil numbering on the ballots, as this, in their opinion, compromised the secrecy of the vote - even though the practice is enshrined in the laws of the country;
- Identification of individuals according to religious/ethnic communities as outlined in the law of Mauritius;
- Perceived campaigning for some candidates by the President;

- The campaign expenditure limit of 250,000 Rupees was allegedly exceeded by some candidates, and some considered this limit to be too high for some and too low for others;
- A lack of state funding for Political Parties; and
- Low representation of women.

These concerns were discussed with the Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs), political parties, civil society and other relevant stakeholders, and explanations were provided.

**Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The SEOM observed the following:

- That prior to, during and after the elections, the political atmosphere was generally peaceful, despite some minor isolated inter-party incidents.
- Members and supporters of contesting parties largely demonstrated a high level of political tolerance and maturity. This created an atmosphere in which people were free to express their opinions and to associate.

- The broader population was perceived to have confidence in the Electoral Management Bodies, and importantly the police force, which serves as the custodian of the ballots between the voting and the counting stations;
- The proclamation of the election date was procedural, in accordance with the Constitution and Electoral Law of Mauritius;
- The conduct of the electoral process by the Electoral Management Bodies was transparent and professional, displaying their technical preparedness to undertake the task at hand
- The legislation of Mauritius does not make provision for the funding of political parties by the state.
- Regarding the low representation of women in all political parties, the SEOM noted the intent to increase their participation;
- The Best Loser System (BLS), which is applied after the completion of vote counting, was explained as an attempt to ameliorate inclusive representation in the National Assembly among the four communities;
- The Electoral Commissioner confirmed that a number of voters had applied to vote by proxy, as provided for in the electoral law, allowing officials who were otherwise engaged on that day to cast their vote.

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On the day of elections, the SEOM observed that:

- Most polling stations opened on time and voting was conducted in accordance with the provisions of the Electoral Law of Mauritius;
- There was a visible presence of agents representing independent candidates, parties and alliances at the opening and closing of polling stations, as well as throughout the voting process;
- The Voters' Roll was in order;
- The voting process was smooth because the layout of the polling stations enabled an easy and orderly flow of voting;
- That every polling station had a special voting room for assisted voters;
- Empty and translucent ballot boxes were shown to the public before they were sealed by the Presiding Officers and party agents prior to the commencement of voting;
- Security personnel were present and the atmosphere during the entire voting process was peaceful;
- Voting was allowed following the confirmation of identities using prescribed national documents;

- Most polling stations closed as provided in the Electoral Law, with those who were still in queues at closing time, being allowed to cast their vote;
- The Presiding Officers and agents sealed the ballot boxes in the presence of party and candidate agents;
- Campaigning continued in accordance with the laws of Mauritius; and
- Counting commenced as scheduled this morning.

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Some best practices observed by the SEOM included:

- a) Efforts by the Mauritian Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) to allocate equitable airtime for candidates, despite the challenge posed by the high number of candidates, were commendable;
- b) Professionalism of the Electoral Management Bodies;
- c) Professional conduct and credibility by the security personnel during the electoral process;

- d) Innovative use of other media such as social media to reach out to youth and other voters;
- e) Annual registration and update of the Voters' Roll;
- f) Issuing of guidelines for private and public broadcasters by the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA).

Having noted the best practices, the SEOM would recommend for consideration, to enhance the electoral process:

- A concerted effort to encourage women to stand as political candidates;
- The use of alternative media to promote wider coverage of political candidates;
- Counting of ballots at polling stations in line with Article 4.1.8 of the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections.

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

We would like to congratulate the people of Mauritius for turning out in high numbers to exercise their constitutional right to vote, and for the political tolerance and maturity they exhibited during this electoral process.

The SEOM further congratulates the Electoral Management Bodies for the professional and transparent manner in which they conducted the elections.

Every democracy requires continuous refinement, and we thus encourage the people of Mauritius to continue to improve any areas of the electoral process as may be required.

Based on our overall observation, the SEOM concludes that the National Assembly Elections held in Mauritius on 10 December 2014 were peaceful, transparent, free and fair, and credible, thus reflecting the will of the people of Mauritius.

The SEOM urges all political parties, alliances and independent candidates, as well as other stakeholders, to respect the will of the people, in accordance with the Constitution and laws of the Republic of Mauritius, as well as the *SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections*.

In the event of election-related grievances, the SEOM encourages the use of existing legal frameworks for redress.

Finally, on behalf of the Chairperson of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation, His Excellency, Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma, President of the Republic of South Africa, the SEOM congratulates the people of the Republic of Mauritius for the manner in which they conducted themselves during the electoral process.

On behalf of all the SADC Observers, we would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the people and the Government of the Republic of Mauritius for their warm welcome and cooperation during the work of our mission.

MERCI, THANK YOU!

Voilà Bagatelle Hotel

Moka

Republic of Mauritius