

**NAURU GENERAL ELECTION
9 JULY 2016**

INTERIM STATEMENT

H.E. ANOTE TONG
Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Mission
Yaren, Sunday 10 July 2016

“We congratulate Nauru for participating peacefully and in high numbers in their 2016 General Election.”

The Commonwealth Observer Mission was invited here by the Nauru Electoral Commission to observe the country’s 2016 General Election. I am privileged to have been asked by the Commonwealth Secretary-General to lead this mission.

We have been warmly welcomed by the people of Nauru since our arrival on 3 July. We have met with the Electoral Commission, members of the Government and Opposition in the previous Parliament, a range of candidates, civil society groups, women and youth groups, media, the Commissioner of Police, and members of the diplomatic corps.

Our team visited all 14 polling stations in the eight constituencies in Nauru and observing the ongoing count.

We have worked closely with the Pacific Islands Forum observer group. We are currently working on our report, which will contain our final conclusion and recommendations. This report will be submitted to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, who will in turn submit it to the Nauru Electoral Commission, the Government, and key stakeholders in the country.

This is the group’s Interim Statement, providing an outline of our key findings at this time, and in recognition that the count is

ongoing, and the results for all eight constituencies are yet to be declared.

Key Interim Findings

We congratulate the people of Nauru for turning out in high numbers to cast their vote. The process was conducted in a peaceful environment and the voters were able to cast their votes freely without fear or intimidation.

Electoral Commission:

We noted that this was the first General Election conducted by the newly-established Nauru Electoral Commission, following the enactment of a new Electoral Act in March 2016. We congratulate the Electoral Commissioner and his team for organising this important national process, particularly in view of the short timeframe it had to prepare. We commend the Commission for producing voter education materials and convening public events to facilitate questions and answers with the candidates and other key stakeholders. We were advised that this was the first time such activities were undertaken before an election. The group commended the technical support provided by the Commonwealth Secretariat, through the deployment of an electoral expert to work with the Commission.

Voters List:

We commend the Commission's efforts in compiling a new voters' list using the Birth, Death and Marriage data in accordance with the new Act. More work is required to clean and remove the duplicates, and deceased persons on the list. We noted the importance of setting up a direct link between the Electoral Commission and the Office of Birth, Death and Marriage, to ensure greater accuracy of the register. A credible electoral roll is essential to the integrity of the electoral process.

Voter Transfers and Proxy Votes:

The high number of transfer of voters from one constituency to another was raised by many stakeholders as a concern. Some stakeholders also criticized the increased fee, set at AUD\$150 to facilitate transfers. The process to facilitate proxy voting needs to be more transparent. The current number of proxy voting each

voter can cast could be reduced, possibly from five to one. Some candidates expressed concerns as to how these proxy votes were facilitated and verified by the Commission. We encourage the Commission to consider these concerns and address them before the next election.

We commend the Electoral Commission for introducing the new measures to enhance the integrity of the process. The introduction of a new requirement for voters to produce identification before their ballot paper is issued, and the use of the indelible ink for the first time has improved the integrity of the process.

Women's participation

We were disappointed with the low number of women candidates that contested the election. However, we were encouraged by the constructive views and optimism expressed by some of the women who have and will continue to play a role in the political processes of Nauru. We urge the Electoral Commission to consider measures and provide an enabling environment to encourage increased representation of women in Parliament. The group was pleased however to note the high number of women who participated as electoral officials during the vote, and the count.

Media

The group noted the absence of an independent media in Nauru. The only media organisation in the country is Nauru Media, which is managed and controlled by Government. We recognized the importance of the Media in playing a constructive role in deepening Nauru's democratic culture. In the absence of a private and independent media organization, the group encouraged the Electoral Commission to consider setting up guidelines and a framework that would enable all the candidates in future elections to access Nauru Media for election-related activities. Such activities could include the Commission disseminating voter education materials, facilitating public debates, and ensuring all the candidates have equal access to the media.

There were concerns expressed to the group that perhaps a more intensive program of civic and voter education could have been implemented before the elections.

Polling Officials

We were of the general view that polling officials displayed professionalism and integrity, and ensured the voting process was well organised and that voters were able to cast their votes in an orderly manner.

The Count

The ongoing count is transparent, and efficient. This follows the Commission's decision to introduce a new process to streamline the counting process.

Security Arrangements

We commend the professional role played by the Nauru Police Force (NPF) and the security arrangements that were put in place for this election. The group received a detailed briefing from the Commissioner of Police and his senior officers on the operational plans the Police had prepared for the elections. The visibility of Nauru Police during polling day and the ongoing count gave confidence to the people to exercise fully their democratic rights in the country's political process.

Conclusion

Finally, the Nauru Electoral Commission is to be congratulated for organising the 2016 General Election. We commended the decision by the previous Government to set up an independent Electoral Commission. We encouraged the next Government to ensure the Electoral Commission is well supported, by making the required financial and technical resources available in a timely manner before the next election.

We encourage all participants in the political process to work together to address any source of instability to Nauru's parliamentary democracy.

We will finalise our report over the next two days and this will include the group's conclusion and a set of recommendations, which could further improve the country's electoral processes.

The Commonwealth's commitment to Nauru's democracy and development will continue. The full declaration of results will be known shortly. I encourage all the elected leaders from this election to pursue a new chapter of political cooperation in ensuring your country's democracy is strengthened and development objectives collectively pursued for the benefit of all the citizens and future generations of Nauru.