



**Interim Statement by
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Former President of the Republic of Botswana
Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group (COG)
Ghana
9th December 2024**

Good morning, Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, the media, fellow observers, Ladies and Gentleman and the people of Ghana. Thank you for honouring our invitation to come to this Commonwealth Observer Group Press Conference.

Thank you for honouring our joint invitation to come to this Observer Group's Conference.

The Commonwealth is honoured to have been invited to observe Ghana's 2024 General Elections. Following the Pre-Election Assessment Mission in October and the subsequent invitation from the Election Commission of Ghana, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland KC, constituted our Group to observe Ghana's 9th Presidential and Parliamentary elections since the transition to multi-party democratic rule in 1992.

We arrived on 29 November and will depart Accra on 13th December. As Chair, I am honoured to lead a Group of sixteen eminent persons drawn from across thirteen Commonwealth member countries and representing all the five regions of the Commonwealth. They are diplomats, and experts in elections management, law, gender, inclusion, youth as well as the media. The Group is independent of the Secretariat.

Our role is to offer an independent, informed and impartial analysis of the electoral process, taking account of all factors which may impact or impinge on the overall credibility of an election.

I now have the privilege to present our preliminary findings which are based on our engagement with a cross section of stakeholders.

Our final report with key recommendations will be submitted to the Secretary-General and shared with the Government of Republic of Ghana as well as other key stakeholders, and to the wider public.

Let me begin with the pre-election environment.

PRE-ELECTION ENVIRONMENT

For a nuanced understanding and assessment of the pre-election environment, our observers met with the Electoral Commission (EC) of Ghana, candidates and representatives of political parties, and civil societies.

We commend the EC and the political parties for their re-engagement through the Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC) and their commitment to transparency in these proceedings by making it accessible and available to the public. We applaud political parties for signing the Peace Pact on 28 November. This is a testament of Ghana's continued commitment to stability and peace and its recognition as a stable democracy.

The professionalism and preparedness of the National Election Security Taskforce is commendable. We had significant engagement with the Police Service, and we were assured of their commitment to peace and de-escalation tactics to ensure that Ghanaians were able to exercise their right to vote in a peaceful manner.

We commend the proficiency and confidence demonstrated by the Inspector General of Police (IGP) as the chief law enforcer for elections in Ghana.

We note that the civil society in Ghana is robust and vibrant. The coalitions of organisations that came together across national and regional networks working on civic and voter education, media training and gender mainstreaming were remarkable and impressive.

We observed the last rallies of two main parties in Accra. Although the rallies were at close proximity, the campaigns were conducted in a peaceful atmosphere. The fundamental rights of candidates, political

parties and supporters to assemble and campaign seemed to have been observed.

Our teams were deployed to ten regions across the country including: Northern Region, Northwest and Northeast, Volta Region, Western and Central Regions, Ashanti Region and Greater Accra.

In these locations, we observed the pre-election preparations and engaged with district election officials, local chiefs and police commanders, to gain a deeper appreciation of the electoral process.

Special Voting

We observed special voting on 2 December 2024. Ghana is to be commended for this initiative, which allows those performing election duty to exercise their franchise. Polling was conducted smoothly in a peaceful environment at polling stations observed. The polling officials were meticulous in following the procedures.

ELECTION DAY

Pre-Poll and Opening of Poll Procedures

The polling officials followed pre-poll and opening procedures diligently. Polling stations largely opened on time, however, some stations opened slightly late due to a number of reasons including the malfunctioning of the Biometric Verification Devices (BVDs) and late setting up of the polling stations.

Conduct of the Polls

Voting was conducted in a peaceful and orderly environment at most polling stations. However, we are saddened by the reports of violence which resulted in death and injury during these elections. The Commonwealth Observer Group condemns this act of violence and calls on the respective authorities to investigate and bring the perpetrators to justice.

The layout of most polling stations which were outside in the open, ensured secrecy of the vote for the most part, though in some cases the positioning of the voting booths could have potentially compromised secrecy.

Polling officials must be commended for conducting their duties with professionalism and transparency.

Participation and Inclusion

We observed the participation of female and male voters as well as polling officials, although, most Presiding Officers were predominantly male.

We observed that Persons With Disabilities (PWDs) and the elderly were given priority and that the visually impaired voters were provided tactile jackets at some polling stations. Polling officials also provided sign language interpretation at some polling stations. This must be commended.

However, we noted accessibility challenges at some polling stations with stairs. We also observed that voting booths were too high for some voters on wheelchairs. Adjustable voting booths would have been helpful in this regard. More needs to be done to ensure that PWDs exercise their franchise with dignity and in accordance with the law.

Political Party Agents

Political party agents were present at most polling stations. They conducted themselves in a professional manner in most polling stations observed.

Citizen and International Observers

We interacted with International and citizen observers at various polling stations.

Close and Count

There were no queues at the close of polls at 5:00 pm, at most polling stations we observed. The polling officials followed closing and counting procedures with transparency and professionalism. We observed that the counting of votes continued after dark in most polling stations. Flashlights and other forms of lighting were provided to assist with this process.

We followed the results process from polling stations to collation centres. We noted some logistical challenges such as the transportation

of ballot boxes at some collation centres and recommend some reforms to ensure order during the collation exercise.

Media

Ghana's media is characterised by vibrant, diverse, and relatively free outlets across traditional and digital platforms.

Despite facing challenges such as financial constraints and disinformation, the media landscape remains robust. Although relatively free, media ownership continues to affect the quality and ethics of journalism.

We commend the media, including radio, TV, and print, for providing extensive coverage of the elections and related issues. We especially commend the state broadcaster for their efforts to maintain balance in airtime allocation.

The Electoral Commission is also commended for fostering a relationship with the media through regular press conferences, statements, and updates on their social media platforms, ensuring journalists and the public stay informed. The EC's decision to reverse restrictions on the number of journalists at collation centres following consultation with media stakeholders is commendable.

Political parties and independent candidates have leveraged social media platforms to share their manifestos without the cost that comes with traditional media. However, there is a growing concern about the negative impact of mis/disinformation and the use of AI to manipulate photos and videos.

We commend the coalition of fact-checkers in Ghana for their initiatives and efforts to mitigate disinformation.

Conclusion and Post-Election Period

We applaud the people of Ghana for turning out in an orderly manner to exercise their franchise.

We commend the Electoral Commission, polling staff, political parties, police and the media for their respective roles in ensuring the successful conduct of the elections in Ghana thus far.

We also commend Vice President Bawumia for his statesmanship and concession speech, it was essential in de-escalating potential tension. Speaking from experience, that is a highly significant gesture. We congratulate the President-Elect, H.E. John Dramani Mahama, for his re-election as the incoming Head of State of the Republic of Ghana.

We note that the process of collating results is still ongoing. We hope and expect that Ghanaians will continue to maintain a peaceful environment in the post-election phase as we await the conclusion of the process.

We will provide recommendations on how the processes might be further improved in our final report which will be made public at a later date.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the people of Ghana for the warm 'AKWAABA' accorded to myself and the group during our entire stay and the unencumbered access we were given for our observation processes.

Ghana's success as the Black Star of Africa is a model for not only the region and the rest of Africa, but the Commonwealth and the world.

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Accra