

**Departure Statement by HE Sir Arnold Amet
Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group**

We have now completed our observation of the 2006 General Elections in Solomon Islands.

We would like to wish the people of Solomon Islands well and congratulate them on their participation in this important exercise as they strive to strengthen democratic processes and sustain the ongoing efforts to promote peace and development of the country.

In our Interim Statement, I made positive remarks about the conduct of the poll and the peaceful and orderly way the whole electoral process was conducted, particularly in view of the fact that this was the first occasion in which the single ballot box system was used. While there were problems in some areas, particularly with the voters' register, we have concluded that the overall process was credible and the results reflected the will of the electors.

We believe however that there are some key areas in the process which would need immediate attention in order to be resolved before the next elections. In our report, we have made several recommendations and suggestions which we believe will make improvements for electoral processes in the future. The voters' register and the entire registration process need an immediate overhaul. We strongly recommend that there should be an urgent review of the status of the Electoral Commission to ensure it is completely independent with adequate resources and permanent staff. This would allow the Commission to undertake these activities without delay. There is also a need for a comprehensive review of electoral legislation, particularly with regard to provisions, or lack thereof, for absentee voting, and registration provisions which take into account the geographic, logistic and socio-economic realities of the country. Due considerations should be given to formalising and strengthening the political party system to promote political stability in the country. This would also promote accountability of the elected members to their respective constituencies.

We were disappointed that none of the female candidates won their seats. More should be done to facilitate the participation of women at the highest levels of decision-making in the country.

We have heard many concerns from the people of the Solomon Islands regarding the election of the Prime Minister and how this process should be held in a transparent manner. We would recommend that provisions are included in future electoral law reform to ensure that this process is conducted in an open and credible manner.

Such reforms would enhance the credibility of the whole electoral environment. The Commonwealth could assist in this process together with other donor organisations in the country.

We would like to express our most sincere appreciation to the people of Solomon Islands for the warm welcome and generous support extended to us during our visit.

Our Team members and all the other international observers have commented on the friendliness and goodwill expressed by the people in all the constituencies they visited.

We have completed our report, which I will submit to the Commonwealth Secretary-General. He will in turn forward it to the Government of the Solomon Islands, the Electoral Commission, the leaders of all the political parties and then to all Commonwealth governments. The report will then be made publicly available, here and throughout the Commonwealth.

Honiara, 12 April 2006