

**ARRIVAL STATEMENT
BY
RATU EPELI NAILATIKAU
CHAIRPERSON
COMMONWEALTH OBSERVER GROUP
23 August 2006**

We are all pleased to be here in Guyana for these General and Regional Elections. Most of us arrived only the day before yesterday, so we have not been here long. But we have already been impressed by the friendliness of the welcome we have received and the hospitality of your people.

As you know, the Commonwealth Secretary-General – HE Rt Hon Don McKinnon - has sent us in response to an invitation from your Government.

Following receipt of the invitation a Commonwealth Secretariat Assessment Mission visited Guyana, in line with usual practice. It reported to the Secretary-General that there would be broad support from the political parties for the presence of Commonwealth Observers and that they would have access to all parts of the electoral process.

We have been preceded not only by that Assessment Mission, but also by former Commonwealth Secretariat official Lach Fergusson and then by a Long-Term Observer, Ms Alison Sutherland, who arrived in June and, after a short break, is with us again now.

Two of our members – Ms Beata Kasale and Ms Mersada Elcock - have formed a further 'Advance Team', and have been here since 4 August. So we have had a presence on the ground for some time, getting a sense of the electoral environment. This means that in addition to making our own observations in the next week we will be able to also have reports from our colleagues covering the months up to election day.

Now the full Observer Group is here. In addition to having the reports of our colleagues, as I have just described, we will be briefed in Georgetown by several of the political parties, a number of non-governmental organisations and Commonwealth High Commissioners.

We have already had briefings from the Elections Commission, the police, domestic election observers and other international

observers. Our briefings finish on Thursday and we will deploy around the country on Friday.

We will see the end of the immediate pre-election period and aim to get an impression of the campaign. On election day we will visit as many polling stations as we can.

Then we will see the counting of the votes and observe the results process. On our return to Georgetown we will write our report and sign it before we leave Guyana on 5 September.

Our report will then go to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, who will in turn forward it to the Government, the Elections Commission, the leadership of all the political parties and then to all Commonwealth governments. The report will be made publicly available, here and throughout the Commonwealth.

We will, of course, abide by the laws of this country. We will travel extensively, consult widely and take every opportunity to see the process for ourselves. We look forward to meeting as many people as possible. We will co-operate closely with other international and domestic election observers to ensure that we maximise our coverage.

We will be neutral, impartial, objective and independent. We cannot visit every polling station or be present everywhere. But we can and will attempt to take a representative sample of the process, so that we can arrive at a broad overview.

Each of us has been selected by the Commonwealth Secretary-General to participate in our individual capacities, but we represent the whole Commonwealth. However, we are independent of our governments and any organisations to which we belong. Our concern is purely with the electoral process and its credibility. Our Terms of Reference from the Commonwealth Secretary-General are:

- to consider the various factors impinging on the credibility of the electoral process as a whole;
- to assess whether, in our own judgement, the conditions exist for a free expression of will by the electors; and
- to determine if the results of the elections reflect the wishes of the people.

We do not expect to issue any statements between now and election day. However, we are likely to produce an 'Interim

Statement' after the voting but before the results process is completed. We are also likely to make a 'Departure Statement' when we leave. We will let you know when these are ready.

We look forward to the task the Secretary-General has given us. We hope that the elections will be conducted in an atmosphere of calm. And we wish you all well as you make the final preparations for next Monday.

END

Georgetown
23 August 2006

For further information contact Geraldine Goh on +592-609-6485