

**Commonwealth Observer Group
Zambia Presidential, National Assembly and Local Government Elections
2006**

**DEPARTURE STATEMENT BY HON PAUL BERENGER, CHAIRPERSON OF
THE COMMONWEALTH OBSERVER GROUP
LUSAKA, 5 OCTOBER 2006**

Our Interim Statement issued the day after the polls closed presented an initial assessment of the electoral process up to that point. Having now completed our observation of the results process and considered the various factors impinging on the credibility of the electoral process as a whole, we now provide our final assessment of the results phase and of the entire process.

We believe that taken as a whole, the conditions existed in Zambia for a free expression of will by the electors and that the results of the elections reflect the wishes of the people.

We congratulate the people of Zambia for their determination to exercise their democratic rights. They have embraced democracy with a zeal that augurs well for the country's future stability and prosperity. Once again we commend the Electoral Commission of Zambia and its Chairperson for a job well done. We also wish to commend the conduct of the Police and security forces.

However, we noted a number of shortcomings, particularly in the results process. This proved to be the most contentious aspect of the electoral process and generated the most complaints on the part of the political parties and civil society organisations. We have already noted the efforts of the ECZ to make the overall process as open and as efficient as possible. The results process was the one area where these efforts did not result in a totally satisfactory level of transparency and credibility.

We were also saddened that the general atmosphere of peace that had characterised the campaign and polling stages of the elections was marred by a few violent incidents during the announcement of the results. We were encouraged, however, when political and civil society leaders quickly condemned this violence and called for calm and restraint. We were particularly pleased that the two main challengers to the presidency publicly committed themselves to using exclusively peaceful and constitutional means in pursuing disputes arising out of the elections. We commend them for their spirit of tolerance and for their political maturity.

We leave Lusaka today, having completed our report to the Commonwealth Secretary-General. This report will make a number of recommendations which we hope will be accepted by all the stakeholders in Zambia in the spirit in which they are made: as suggestions from friends of Zambia intended to further

strengthen public confidence in the country's democratic processes and institutions and to help provide a strong democratic foundation on which the country's economic development can be built.