

**DEPARTURE STATEMENT BY DR SALIM AHMED SALIM,
CHAIRPERSON OF THE
COMMONWEALTH OBSERVER GROUP
Banjul, 29 September 2006**

In our Interim Statement issued on 23 September 2006, we indicated that our Observers would report on their impressions in the various polling stations and this would form the basis of our judgement on the entire process. We also had the opportunity of exchanging views with international and local observers.

We have now concluded our report. It will be presented to the Commonwealth Secretary-General who will then send it to all the stakeholders in The Gambia and Commonwealth Governments.

Our terms of reference specified two broad objectives. The first was to determine whether conditions existed for a free expression of will by the people. The second objective was to determine whether the results of the election reflected the wishes of the people. We believe that the people of the Gambia expressed their will and the result reflected their wish. But we would have liked to see a more level playing field and a more restrained utilisation of the advantages of incumbency.

We were impressed by the quality of performance of the Independent Electoral Commission. We also admire the commitment of the people of The Gambia to democracy and their belief in the electoral process. These are strong foundations on which to build, maintain and strengthen a politically stable society.

As we depart, we want to express our sincere gratitude to the Government, the Independent Electoral Commission, the political parties, civil society and the people of The Gambia for the cooperation and support accorded to our team.

We wish The Gambia well.