

Arrival Statement by Baroness Valerie Amos, Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group for Ghana Elections.

1 December 2008

Good afternoon

The Commonwealth Observer Group, constituted by the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Kamalesh Sharma, is pleased to be in Ghana at the invitation of the Electoral Commission of Ghana.

I am privileged to have been asked to lead the Group.

Ghana is a valued member of the Commonwealth. It has demonstrated leadership in the democratisation process in Commonwealth Africa, and indeed for the rest of the continent.

The promotion of democracy and of sustainable development are the twin pillars on which Commonwealth activities are based. We believe the two are and should be mutually reinforcing. A credible election can only serve to advance this healthy relationship and entrench democracy.

As Commonwealth Secretary-General, Kamalesh Sharma, noted while constituting this Group, this is a particularly important election for this country, because it will take Ghana to the next level of its democratisation process.

The Commonwealth, Africa, and indeed the whole world look forward to a peaceful and orderly election process. All want to see Ghana continue to make the continent proud by conducting a credible election.

Our task is to observe and report on relevant aspects of the organisation and conduct of the elections and the overall electoral environment. We will be guided by the declaration of principles for international election observation and the code of conduct for international election observers to which the Commonwealth is a signatory.

In conducting our duties, our assessment will be neutral, impartial, objective and independent. We come here with an open mind. Our presence is a demonstration of the commitment of the Commonwealth to the democratisation process in the country. Our function is not to supervise, but to observe the process as a whole and form a judgement with the intent to help strengthen the democratic process.

Commonwealth Observers are invited in their individual capacities. The assessment the Group makes will be its own, and not that of Commonwealth member governments or the Commonwealth Secretariat.

We have already met officials from Electoral Commission who gave us a briefing about the preparations for the election.

We will meet representatives of political parties, civil society, members of the diplomatic community, media, as well as representatives of other international observer groups in order to consider the broadest range of perspectives and views.

Members of the Group will then travel to different parts of the country to observe the concluding days of the campaign and thereafter the voting, counting and results processes. Following this, the Group will reconvene to compile our final report.

The Final Report will contain our major findings and conclusions as well as any recommendations we may have to strengthen the electoral process. It will be submitted to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, who in turn will forward it to the Government of Ghana, the Election Commission, the political parties and then to all Commonwealth member Governments.

The report will also be made available to the public, the media and will be placed on the website of the Commonwealth Secretariat.

I will now request my colleagues to introduce themselves and take some questions.

The other members of the Group are :

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| Baroness Valerie Amos (Chair) Former Leader of the House of Lords United Kingdom | Mr Simon Clarke Election Expert United Kingdom |
| Ms Cynthia Barrow-Giles Lecturer & Member of the Constitutional Reform Commission University of West Indies St. Lucia | Commissioner Algassimu Sahid Jarr Commissioner National Electoral Commission Sierra Leone |
| Ms Sarika Katoch Commonwealth Regional Youth Caucus Representative India | Mr Gary (Guerin) Ouellet Former Canadian Returning Officer Canada |
| Mr O O Akeredolu SAN President Nigeria Bar Association Nigeria | |