



Commonwealth Observer Group for the Bangladesh General Election

ARRIVAL STATEMENT BY H.E. CASSAM UTEEM CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMONWEALTH OBSERVER GROUP

The Commonwealth Secretary-General, Kamallesh Sharma, has constituted an Observer Group for the 2008 Bangladesh Parliamentary Elections following an invitation from the Foreign Affairs Adviser of the Caretaker Government of Bangladesh.

It is my honour and privilege to have been asked to lead this Commonwealth Observer Group and be here in Bangladesh at this time. These elections should enable the resumption of normal democratic life in the country and the re-constitution of the parliament. I am very glad that the State of Emergency has now been fully lifted so that the election campaign and polling can be conducted under normal conditions.

As the Secretary-General noted during his visit to Dhaka in October, democracy and good governance are core Commonwealth principles and the restoration of representative democracy in Bangladesh is as important to the Commonwealth as it is to the people of Bangladesh themselves.

Our task as the Commonwealth Observer Group is to observe and report on relevant aspects of the organisation and conduct of the elections. The group will consider all the factors impinging on the credibility of the electoral process as a whole, and assess whether the elections have been conducted according to the standards for democratic elections to which Bangladesh has committed itself, with reference to its own election-related legislation as well as relevant regional, Commonwealth and other international commitments.

In this regard, we will consider, among other things, the transparency of the process; whether the state apparatus and state media remained impartial; whether candidates were free to campaign and voters were able to express their will free of intimidation and that their will was respected.

In conducting our duties and undertaking our assessment, we will be neutral, impartial, objective and independent. If we offer any criticism it will be constructive, with the intent to help strengthen the democratic process in the country for the future.

Commonwealth Observers are present here in their individual capacities as eminent Commonwealth citizens. The assessment by the Group will be its own and not that of member governments or of the Commonwealth Secretariat.

The team of Observers come from across the Commonwealth, from current and former members of parliament to a former chief election commissioner and representatives of civil society and the media.

We have already met with officials from the Election Commission who briefed us on their preparations for the election. We have met with representatives of one of the political parties and will be meeting a few more parties in the coming days. We will also speak with representatives of civil society, media, High Commissions and representatives of other international and domestic observation groups before deploying to different parts of the country to observe the conclusion of the campaign and thereafter the voting, counting and results processes.

We will issue an Interim Statement after the poll and a Final Report upon completion of our duties.

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Note to Editors

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