



COMMONWEALTH OBSERVER GROUP

Solomon Islands National Parliamentary Elections, 4 August 2010

Arrival Statement by Dr Arthur Donahoe QC, Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group

The Commonwealth Secretary-General, Mr Kamallesh Sharma, has constituted an Observer Group for the 2010 Solomon Islands National Parliamentary Elections, following an invitation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade.

It is our honour and privilege to have been asked to participate in this Commonwealth Observer Group; it is an important event in the consolidation of peace and democracy in Solomon Islands.

Democracy and good governance are core Commonwealth principles and ones which our Observer Group has been constituted to promote, and to which Solomon Islands has committed itself. In order to fulfil this commitment, it is imperative that the electoral process is transparent, fair and ultimately reflects the wishes of the people.

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

Among other things, we will consider whether the conditions exist for free and competitive elections; the transparency of the process; participation rights; the impartiality of state apparatus and public media; whether voters enjoyed universal suffrage and the right to vote; whether candidates were free to campaign on a level playing field; if voters were able to express their will free of intimidation and undue influence; and if their will was respected.

In conducting our duties and undertaking our assessment, we will be neutral, impartial, objective and independent. 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. In concluding our assessment, we hope to identify positive aspects of the process, and where challenges may be faced, offer constructive recommendations which could help strengthen further the democratic process in the country.

Our Observers come from across the Commonwealth, and includes former politicians, members of election commissions, a scholar and representatives of youth and the media.

In the pre-election period we will meet with officials from the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission (SIEC), representatives of political parties and candidates, civil society and media, as well as High Commissions and representatives of other international and domestic observer groups. We will also attend briefings organised by the UN International Election Observer Coordination Team this weekend. We acknowledge, with thanks, the role and assistance of the Coordination Team in arranging logistics and deployment to ensure maximum coverage by our Group.

Prior to election day, Commonwealth observers will deploy to six of the nine provinces around the country and in Honiara to observe the voting, counting and results processes. Our Group will co-ordinate closely with other international and domestic observer groups before, during and after the poll.

We will issue an Interim Statement after the election but we are aware that the results process is likely to take some time; our Interim Statement will therefore be a preliminary one which comments on the process up to that point.

The conduct of peaceful, transparent and credible elections is vital for Solomon Islands and we urge all concerned to meet their responsibilities in this regard. The Group wishes the people of Solomon Islands well and hope that these elections serve to strengthen further the democratic process in the country.

Honiara, 30 July 2010

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