

**Solomon Islands General Election 2006: Arrival Statement by HE Sir Arnold Amet, Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group, 28 March 2006**

‘On behalf of the Commonwealth Observer Group, may I say how pleased we are to be here in Solomon Islands. Four of our members are yet to arrive, but most are here and we begin work today. Perhaps I should also mention that the Commonwealth had a similar role in your 2001 elections.

The Commonwealth Secretary-General has asked me to lead this Observer Group following an invitation from the Government of Solomon Islands, and after a visit by a Commonwealth Secretariat Assessment Mission last month.

The mission concluded that there would be broad support for the presence of Commonwealth Observers. It said that we would be able to freely observe all stages of the process.

Our Terms of Reference from the Commonwealth Secretary-General explain that we are here:

- To consider the various factors impinging on the credibility of the electoral process as a whole;
- To assess whether, in our own judgement, the conditions exist for a free expression of will by the electors; and
- To determine if the result of the elections reflect the wishes of the people.

We will be neutral, impartial, objective and independent. We are not here to supervise but to observe the process as a whole and to form a judgement accordingly.

We cannot visit every polling station or be present everywhere. But will take a representative sample of the process, so that we can arrive at a broad overview.

We will see the end of the immediate pre-election period – the final preparations for the election and the campaign. We will visit as many polling stations as we can. We will then see the results process through from the counts to the collation at the District Centres.

We will endeavour to travel extensively, consult widely and take every opportunity to see the process for ourselves. We look forward to meeting as many people of this country as possible. We will co-operate closely

with other international and domestic election observers. We will, of course, abide by the laws of this country.

Each of us has been selected by the Commonwealth Secretary-General to participate in our individual capacities. We represent the whole Commonwealth. We are independent of our governments and any organisations to which we belong. Our concern is purely with the electoral process and its credibility.

We have two advance observers who have been in the country since 14 March 2006. They will brief our Team tomorrow. We will also be briefed by members of the Electoral Commission, political parties, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), Commonwealth High Commissioners and others. We will also attend a briefing organised by the UNEAD Election Observer Coordination Team, scheduled for this Saturday and Sunday. We acknowledge the role played by the UN Coordination Team in arranging logistics and deployment to ensure maximum coverage possible by the observers. On Monday, 3 April, we will deploy around the islands to begin our observation.

Following deployment, we will return to Honiara to consider our report. We will take into account our direct observations of the polling and results process. We will also consider the electoral environment as a whole – the legal framework, the voter registration process, civic and voter education, the media, the freedom of the parties and the candidates to campaign, and the freedom of the voters to vote as they wish. We will write the report here and sign it before we depart on 14 April.

When we leave we will submit our report to the Commonwealth Secretary-General. He will in turn forward it to the Government, the Electoral Commission, the leaders of all the political parties and then to all Commonwealth governments. The report will then be made publicly available, here and throughout the Commonwealth.

You will, I am sure, want to know when you may hear from us again. I should tell you therefore that we will not be producing a running commentary on the election, day by day.

We may issue an interim statement after the polls close on 5 April. We may make further statements after that, on the results process – a part of the whole to which we attach particular importance. We are also likely to make a ‘departure statement’. I am the Group’s spokesman and will speak on behalf of the Commonwealth Observer Group as a whole.

We wish the people of Solomon Islands well as they approach the conclusion of this electoral process.’