INTRODUCTION


The African Union Election Observation Mission (AUEOM) arrived in the Republic of Mauritius on 31st October 2019 and will remain in the country until 12th November 2019.

The African Union Election Observation Mission (AUEOM) is led by Her Excellency Dr. Speciosa Kazibwe Wandira, former Vice President of the Republic of Uganda, Member of the AU Panel of the Wise and Co-chairperson of FemWise Africa. The AUEOM comprises ambassadors drawn from the Permanent Representatives’ Committee (PRC) of the African Union (AU), members of the Pan-African Parliament (PAP), election administrators, civil society, media and electoral experts.

The deployment of an AUEOM to Mauritius demonstrates the AU’s commitment to supporting peaceful, democratic and credible electoral processes in its Member States by providing an objective assessment of the process. This is in line with Aspiration 3 of Agenda 2063, which aims at ensuring good governance, democracy, and respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law on the continent. The conduct of peaceful, democratic and credible elections is widely recognized as being critical to the achievement of Agenda 2063 and the AU’s vision of an integrated, peaceful and prosperous African continent.

METHODOLOGY

Relevant AU instruments such as the 2007 African Union Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, the 2002 OAU/AU Declaration on Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa and the 2002 African Union Guidelines for Election Observation and Monitoring Missions, as well as Mauritius’s legal framework and international commitment for democratic elections have guided the Mission’s activities.
To have a better understanding of the political dynamic and as part of its assessment of the elections, the Mission met various stakeholders including the Acting President, H.E Paramasivum Pillay, the Electoral Commissioner, M. Irfan Abdul Rahman, the Minister of Justice, Human Rights and Institutional Reforms, Hon. Maneesh Gobin, Heads of International Election Observation Missions, and the Academia.

On Election Day, the AUEOM deployed 15 teams of 2 observers each, which visited 207 voting rooms in 21 constituencies. The observers were equipped with tactile tablets and transmitted data to a coordination team based at the mission secretariat.

This statement presents the Mission’s preliminary findings and observations covering pre-voting up to, and including the closing and counting procedures on 08 November 2019.

A final comprehensive report will be released upon the conclusion of the electoral process and will be shared with relevant stakeholders of the Republic of Mauritius.

PRE-ELECTION FINDINGS

A. Political Context

The Mission noted that elections were conducted under peaceful and calm conditions. However, stakeholders that the Mission interacted with raised some concerns related to the timing of elections – which have taken place concurrently with national examinations.

B. Role of the Media

The media has played a great role in covering the elections. However, the mission noted some concerns by local stakeholders, with the inequitable coverage of all political parties by the state media.

ELECTION DAY FINDINGS

Mauritians went to the polls on 7 November 2019 in a calm and peaceful atmosphere. The AUEOM visited 207 polling stations, 43 % of which were located in rural areas and 57 % in urban areas. The AUEOM made the following observations on polling day:

A. Location and accessibility of polling stations

Most polling stations were located in schools that were easily accessed by the voters. They were laid out in a manner that allowed for easy flow of voters. The Mission noted and commends the special voting rooms, dedicated to people living with disabilities—called Special Needs Voting Rooms (SNRV), which were located in all polling stations visited. Assistance was provided to these people according to the voting procedures. The Mission also noted that priority was not necessarily given to the elderly and pregnant women.
B. Polling environment

In all polling stations observed by the Mission, the environment was calm and peaceful. Queues were observed in 53% of the observed voting rooms. Observers also noticed campaign activities and materials within the prescribed limit in 8% of the polling stations observed.

C. Opening procedures

The Mission noted that candidates, political parties and polling agents were granted access to the polling stations before the opening to perform their duties without interference or restrictions. Ballot boxes were noted to be empty and properly sealed before the resumption of the vote.

D. Parties, polling agents and observers

Political parties, candidates and international observers were present at polling stations visited by the Mission.

E. Election materials

The AUEOM noted that election materials were available in sufficient quantities throughout the day. Election officials and polling agents had copies of the electoral list in voting rooms observed to help confirm voters’ identity.

F. Election personnel

The Mission noted the presence of the full complement of voting room staff in stations observed.

AU Observers noted that polling staff performed their tasks professionally and consistently maintained interaction with election stakeholders such as political parties, polling officers and international observers.

G. Voting process

The understanding of the voting procedures and the peaceful atmosphere in polling stations contributed to a smooth voting process. The process was not interrupted nor disturbed at any time in voting rooms observed. All polling stations visited remained opened until the official closing time.

The AUEOM noted that in all voting rooms observed, the secrecy of the vote was guaranteed. Some voters were turned away in 4% of the voting rooms visited due to voter identification issues. The Mission also noted that some citizens were disenfranchised, because they could not find their names on the Voters’ Roll.

The Mission noted that in 91% of the voting rooms visited, no campaign activities or materials were observed.
H. Participation of women

The Mission regrettably notes the low number of female candidates (18.52 %), compared to that of male candidates (81.48 %). However, the AUEOM commends the high level of participation of women as election officials and party agents. Women were well represented in the voting rooms visited, as polling staff (64%) and as representatives of parties/candidates (46%).

I. Security

The Mission noted the professionalism and the discretion of the security personnel in the polling stations where they observed the poll.

J. Closing of the poll

All the polling stations observed by the AU observers closed at the legal closing time at 18H00 for Mauritius and 17H00 for Rodrigues.

The AUEOM noted the peaceful and calm atmosphere at the time of closing. There were no queues observed at closing and security personnel were professional and discreet. Observers and polling agents were able to observe closing procedures without interference.

K. Counting Procedures

On the 8th of November, the AU EOM teams observed the counting from various counting centers. Although the counting procedure was delayed, having been conducted on the day after Election Day, the AUEOM noted that counting centers were professionally manned by security personnel. The AUEOM also noted that the counting process did not allow political party agents to raise their concerns regarding the procedure as per international best practice (they were not able to check the seals and counter-check the counting of ballot papers).

RECOMMENDATIONS

A. To the government:
   - Reconsider the political party and candidate finance law in order to ensure a level playing field.
   - Consider enacting a law to enforce affirmative action to ensure meaningful participation of women as candidates in the electoral process.
   - Consider enforcing a law on the full participation of civil society in the electoral process through civic education and election observation.

B. The electoral authorities:
The Electoral Commission should consider adhering to international procedures of counting the ballots on the same day of the election, and posting the results outside the polling stations.

The Electoral Commission is encouraged to ensure that the ballot booths are positioned in a manner that ensures secrecy of the vote.

Electoral Commission is urged to consider usage of indelible ink to prevent the likely incidence of people voting more than once, by for example, using multiple identity cards.

C. To political parties:
- Ensure training of political party agents in voting procedures, to enable them to effectively monitor the elections.
- Avoid having party agents wearing party regalia and symbols inside the voting rooms / polling stations.

D. To the Civil Society Organizations:
- Play a greater role in the consolidation of democracy in the Republic of Mauritius.

CONCLUSION

The AUEOM applauds the people of Mauritius for their commitment to upholding democracy as demonstrated in the peaceful conduct of the campaign and the polls.

Based on its findings, and despite some challenges encountered on Election and Counting Days, the AUEOM concludes that the 07 November legislatives elections were peacefully and professionally conducted.

The AUEOM calls on political parties, candidates and the people of Mauritius to preserve peace in the country and resort to legal means in case of any disputes arising from the elections.

Once again, the AUEOM congratulates the people of Mauritius for the peaceful legislative elections.

Port Louis, 09th November 2019

For the Mission,

Her Excellency Dr. Speciosa Kazibwe Wandira,

Head of the Mission