

## **Election Situation Room (ESR)**

### **Local Government Elections for Chairperson and Mayoral Positions 20<sup>th</sup> May 2023**

#### **Statement on Voting and Closing of Polls**

##### **Introduction**

Voting in the 20<sup>th</sup> May 2023 Chairpersons and Mayoral elections opened and closed on time as stipulated in the Electoral Act in most of the polling stations where our field observers were deployed and observed. Since the opening of polls at 8am, our 130 elections observers that were deployed across The Gambia have observed the voting process at the respective polling stations of their deployment in constituencies scattered across the seven (7) administrative regions of The Gambia. The narrative below is the rundown of CSO Coalition observation of the voting process as reported by our observers in areas where they observed.

##### **Voting Process**

Our observers reported that in 98.4% of the areas where they observed polling stations were easily accessible, while in 99.7% of the areas of their deployment, the proper procedure for voting was largely followed by IEC officials. It was also reported that in 99% of the polling stations observed, voting information was correctly displayed both inside and outside the polling stations.

Our observers also reported that security was provided throughout the voting process in most of the polling stations observed. Field observers reported that in 98.7% of the polling stations observed police personnel provided security outside the polling stations. It was also reported that in 97.8% of the polling stations observed, queue and crowd control was adequate and effective. IEC polling staff and party agents representing various political parties and candidates were present in 97.5% and 98.7% of the polling stations where they were deployed respectively. It was also reported that in 87.6% of polling stations observed, media representatives were present to cover the election process. In the same wise, observers were reported to be present in 73% of polling stations visited by our field observers.

Our observers from the field reported that the voting process was conducted according to rules and regulations as contained in the Election Act. It was reported that in 92.7% of polling stations observed, non-accredited persons were not allowed inside the polling station. In 98.7% of polling stations where they observed, our observers reported that voters' identifications were scrutinized and checked against the voter roll/register. In respect of the secrecy of the voting casting process, our observers reported that in 99.4% of the polling stations they observed, vote casting was

conducted in secrecy. It was also reported that in all polling stations visited (100%), presiding officers ensured that token ballots were properly casted by the electorate. Our observers also reported that there were no reports of polling stations running out of any election material in areas where they observed.

Our field observers also reported that in 99.4% of the polling stations visited, women constituted the highest. It was reported that in around 41.5% of the polling stations visited, more than 50 percent of voters in the queue were women. In around 29.7% of polling stations visited between 30 to 50 percent of voters on the queue were women. Our observers reported that in 15.6% of polling stations visited, more than 50 percent of voters on queue were youth. In the same vein, in 30.8% of polling stations visited, around 30-50 percent of voters on queue were youth. It was also reported that in 75.5% of the polling stations observed, pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers were given preference when voting. Our observers also reported that in 91.2% of polling stations visited women were able to vote without any impediments. The reports from our observers pointed to the fact that women constituted the majority of voters, and most of them voted without any impediments, while the turnout of youth was observed to be low in the areas where our observers were deployed. Overall, our observers reported in 98.7% of polling stations visited, voting process was generally peaceful, orderly, and calm.

### **Closing Process of Polls**

Generally, polls closed at the stipulated time of 5pm in most polling stations observed with 95% of polling stations visited. IEC staff and polling agents, party agents, media as well as observers were present during the closure of polls. In almost 79.4% of polling stations observed, local observers and media there were still voters in the queue at closing time, were allowed to vote as required by law.

Procedures for the close of polls were largely followed in most of the stations observed and polling agents signed off on the close of poll report, indicating their acceptance of the procedure.

### **Concerns**

The presence of non-accredited persons within polling stations and the display of party paraphernalia inside and around polling stations, although low, remain a recurring incidence in public elections. We observed cases of party supporters canvassing votes around polling stations in Banjul. From the fact checkers, it has been observed that both NPP and UDP were canvassing and influencing voters. In an isolated case, a party agent was confirmed assaulted by a PIU in Banjul. However, there was no significant interference with the voting process. Also, there were clashes in and around polling stations although these were put under control without posing any disruption to the voting process.

### **Conclusion**

The CSO Coalition notes, with deep appreciation, the smooth and calm manner that characterised the vote today. We recognize and applaud the IEC, the police as well as observers

and the media for the effective way they carried out their respective functions to ensure a smooth and peaceful elections.

At the same time, we deplore the minor incidences around polling stations which, if not addressed immediately, could have caused significant disruption to the voting process. For that matter, we reiterate our call for all electoral stakeholders to always exercise calm and address any grievances through dialogue and other peaceful means in line with the law.

As we look forward to the counting of votes and the declaration of results, the CSO Coalition remains committed to a free and fair elections as hallmark of democracy and sustainable development.

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**CSO Coalition on Elections,**  
15 April 2023