



**PRESS BRIEFING ON THE STATE OF ELECTORAL PROCESS BY 10 AM
BASED ON OBSERVATION DATA TRANSMITTED TO THE ELECTION
SITUATION ROOM**

23rd June, 2020

Malawi Electoral Commission

Security Agencies

ALL Media Houses

ALL Political Parties and candidates

Introduction

The Election Situation Room is receiving real time data on the state of the electoral process across the country. The data is being posted by observers deployed by NICE, CCJP and PAC stationed at all polling centres and roving within constituencies. Further data is being received from ordinary citizens through a platform for citizen journalism. The Election Situation Room is also receiving reports through phone calls and other media. All the information is diligently verified by experts stationed in the Election Situation Room.

At this stage, we would like to update the nation on our observation of the electoral activities since yesterday when inspection of polling materials started to around 10:30am today focusing on critical areas for attention.

Inspection of polling materials on 22nd June 2020

- Generally, availability of polling staff, party representatives for inspection, timeliness of delivery were observed except for a few cases such as in Nkhotakota and Mzimba districts.

- No discrepancies in the deliveries were noted.

Suspicious activities fueling rumours of rigging

- In Nkhotakota, Salima there have been reports of alleged misconduct. We gather that a number of people were arrested by the military police in relation to rumours that they were ex-military personnel in the Malawi Defense Force (MDF).
- Police sources say statements obtained from the suspects suggest that they were recruited to be party representatives for the DPP. Seven of the suspects are reportedly from the southern region. There are allegations of premarked ballots and intended ballot stuffing but these have not been confirmed yet.
- Ordinarily, the model of recruiting party monitors is locally done. We therefore find the alleged recruitment of ex-service men out of order and reason for further investigation by the law enforcing agencies and the Malawi Electoral Commission.
- In relation to the same Nkhotakota incidents, we have obtained reports of destruction of property by irate citizens. We condemn all violence and call for restraint. Whenever allegations of electoral malpractice are made, citizens should allow law enforcing agencies to conduct investigations and allow justice to take course. We appeal to security agencies to be professional and non-partisan whilst handling this sensitive matter

Opening time of polling stations

- Information we have received show that 99% of the centres were opened on time by 6:30am. One percent of the centres opened later due to delays in the delivery of voting materials. An For example, this was reported at Mzimba Hora and Chichiri Prison where voting had not yet started by 9: 30 am.

Queuing at Polling Stations

- There were long queues reported in almost 87% of the polling centres. This shows voter enthusiasm to exercise the right to vote. In some cases, however, this was a result of delays in opening the centres in question. All things being equal, this may present an opportunity for voting and result counting to end on time.

Security at Polling Stations

- There was 100% deployment of security personnel. This also saw maintenance of peace, law and order in 95% of the centres.
- In 100 % of the polling centres, ballot papers were secured and sealed. These were opened in the presence of all party monitors. The information sourced suggests that the boxes were not tampered with before voting commenced.

Availability of Voting Materials

- All polling centres had adequate voting materials that included adequate ballot boxes, ballot papers, embossing devices, ink bottles and pens.
- In areas where voting had commenced, there was evidence that most centres were providing fresh ballot papers in the event that a voter had spoilt the initial ballot.
- However, malfunctioning of equipment was reported in 6% of the centres.
- In addition, 92% of the centres had COVID-19 prevention measures in place.

Availability of party representatives

In centres where we have received information this far, party representatives were deployed as follows:

- Party representatives were able to perform their duties in 96 % of the centres
- CSO Observers were able to perform their duties in 96% of the centres

Verification of Voters

- Verification of voters was made through calling out loud of voters names in 100% of the centres. Voter names were ticked off after identification in 96%.

Access to Voting by vulnerable populations

- In 99% polling centres persons with disabilities, pregnant women and the elderly were given priority on the queue.

Conclusion

In view of data that we have accessed so far, there is need to reiterate the maintenance of law and order during and after the elections. We wish to commend the military and the Malawi Police on their efforts to ensure paece and order. We also urge all citizens and party leaders to exercise restraint.

We also call upon the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) to institute swift remedial actions in areas where some challenges with the potential negatively affect the vote outcome.

The Situation Room has also observed that social media has overtaken the prevailing legal framework, allowing people to continue campaigning. We need to emphasise that such emerging issues require long-term solutions beyond the election period.

Recommendations

- Security agencies to mantain investigations
- All voters to go to their respective polling stations even when they lost their voting credentials
- Politicians and party supporters must stop campaigning - offline as well as online;

- Any noted incidents of campaigning should be reported to MEC and the law enforcing agencies.
- As the electoral process continues, all measures to prevent spread of the COVID-19 measures should be enforced.

Boniface Chibwana

Chairperson of the Election Observation Consortium***