



PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

BY

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HEAD OF THE SADC ELECTORAL OBSERVATION MISSION (SEOM)

AND

FORMER CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA

TO

THE 2024 NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

OF THE

REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS

12 NOVEMBER 2024

- **Her Excellency Terai Joice Mujuru,
Head of the African Union Electoral Observation Mission (AUEOM)
and Former Vice President of the Republic of Zimbabwe;**
- **Honourable Nicolae Popescu
Head of Mission of Francophonie Electoral Observer Mission (FEO)
and
Former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the
Republic of Moldova;**
- **Bishop Siphon Tembe
Head of the Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC Countries
(ECF-SADC) and Vice Chairperson of the Elections & Boundaries
Commission of the Kingdom of Eswatini;**
- **Your Excellencies, Heads and Representatives of the Diplomatic
Missions Accredited to the Republic of Mauritius;**
- **Distinguished Heads of International Election Observation Missions
here present;**
- **His Excellency Elias Magosi, SADC Executive Secretary;**
- **Distinguished Heads of International Organisations;**
- **Distinguished Members of the SADC Organ Troika;**
- **Distinguished Representatives of the Government of the Republic of
Mauritius;**
- **Chairperson, Representatives and Members of the Electoral
Commission;**

- **Members of the SADC Electoral Advisory Council (SEAC);**
- **SADC Election Observers;**
- **Representatives of Local Election Observers;**
- **Religious Leaders and Members of Civil Society Organisations;**
- **Members of the Media;**
- **Distinguished Guests;**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen.**

1. INTRODUCTION

On behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and as mandated by Her Excellency Dr. Samia Suluhu Hassan, the President of the United Republic of Tanzania, and the Chairperson of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defense and Security Cooperation, it is my distinct honour to welcome you all to this important event where I will present the release of the Preliminary Statement of the SADC Electoral Observation Mission (SEOM) on the 2024 National Assembly Elections, held on 10 November 2024, in the Republic of Mauritius.

As Head of the SEOM, I am well supported by representatives from the United Republic of Tanzania and the Republics of Malawi and Zambia as members of the SADC Organ Troika. Our Mission was also advised by two members from the SADC Electoral Advisory Council (SEAC).

The SEOM comprised thirty-five (35) observers from nine (9) SADC Member States, namely, the Kingdom of Eswatini, the Republics of Botswana, Namibia, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and the United Republic of Tanzania. These observers were deployed to all the ten(10) administrative districts of Mauritius, namely, Black River, Flacq, Grand Port, Moka, Pamplemousses, Plaines-Wilhems, Port-Louis, Rivière du Rempart, Savanne and Rodrigues.

At the invitation of the Government of the Republic of Mauritius, the Mission observed the National Assembly Elections in accordance with the Revised SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections (2021) and the relevant Laws of the Republic of Mauritius.

As part of its mandate, the Mission engaged key stakeholders in the Republic of Mauritius, including the Electoral Management Bodies (EMB), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade , Political Parties, Civil Society Organisations, the Attorney General, Academia, SADC Ambassadors and High Commissioners and other members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Republic of Mauritius, the Mauritius Police Force, the Council of Religious Leaders and the Media.

This Preliminary Report covers the Mission's observation of the Pre-Election Process, Election Day and Counting. The final report will further cover our observations of the Post-Election process, including the results management and announcement.

2. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

2.1 The Political and Security Environment

The Mission observed that the country was calm and peaceful during the pre-election, election day, and the counting, attesting to the peaceful nature of Mauritians. The Mission further observed no major incidents or threats of violence during this electoral cycle. I, therefore, wish to use this opportunity to commend the people of Mauritius for their peaceful conduct, which contributed to the conducive electoral environment.

The Mission noted the stakeholders' satisfaction with the police presence across the constituencies, increased security detail in the form of patrols following nomination day, and the advanced training and planning for deploying officers to various polling stations.

In pursuit of maintaining law and order during the elections, the Mission noted that a Police Communique was issued prohibiting the sale of alcohol on the day preceding the elections, on polling day and the day after the elections.

The Mauritius Police Force maintained vigilance and preserved peace by providing the necessary security to all stakeholders during the pre-election, election day and counting day, ensuring a conducive electoral environment.

2.2 Management of the Electoral Process

The elections were overseen by the Electoral Management Bodies (EMB) established under Chapter 5 of the Constitution of the Republic of Mauritius.

In this regard, the Mission observed the following:

- (i) The general confidence and trust amongst stakeholders in the Electoral Commissioner's Office ;
- (ii) Voter registration was generally well conducted in the two rounds of the voter registration exercise by the Office of the Electoral Commissioner. The first round was conducted between January and February 2024 and involved house-to-house enquiries to verify the presence/existence of each voter for purposes of voter registration. About 2,649 personnel were engaged to embark on this exercise. The second round was conducted at regional centres between 16-30 May 2024;
- (iii) The Mission noted concerns over the alleged discrepancies in the electors' register. Some stakeholders alleged that the register of electors still contained names of persons not in the country and those who were known to be deceased. They feared that such names could create an opportunity for rigging elections. Against this background, the Office of the Electoral Commissioner assured the Mission that the electors' register was updated through door-to-door enquiries to confirm the physical presence of electors. However, discrepancies might arise as a result of electors leaving the country after registering;

- (iv) Out of a population of one million two hundred and sixty- one thousand, one hundred and ninety- six (**1,261,196**) (Official Census of 2022), the Mission observed that the Office of the Electoral Commissioner registered one million and two thousand, eight hundred and fifty-seven (**1,002,857**) **voters** being 79.5% of the population, **with female voters being 51.3% and male voters being 48.7%**;
- (v) The Mission noted concerns from a few stakeholders on proxy voting, noting that this could be perceived as creating an opportunity for electoral malpractices ;
- (vi) The Mission noted concerns from stakeholders that the counting of votes was still not conducted on polling day at polling stations. While some stakeholders claimed that this presented an opportunity for election rigging, others supported counting votes on a day when electoral officers are not exhausted. Some stakeholders recommended that this could be avoided if information, communication and technology could be adopted. They further argued that the counting of votes on the same day as voting presents practical and financial challenges as this would require more human resources; some stakeholders informed the Mission that this issue has been the subject of protracted debates, but there has not been any consensus in this respect;
- (vii) The Mission was informed that there had not been any electoral law reforms since the last elections. In the same vein, there were

no pending electoral petitions and litigation before the courts relating to this election. Some stakeholders acknowledged that the Office of the Electoral Commissioner had done its part in submitting its recommendations of electoral reforms to the Government, which in turn submitted such recommendations to Parliament but were never approved. Some stakeholders attributed the delay in the approval of electoral reforms to a lack of voter education, weak and/or limited participation of civil society organisations and lack of political will;

- (viii) While noting the existence of a clear mechanism for lodging electoral complaints and appeals, some stakeholders raised concerns about the long turnaround time and the need to establish electoral courts that will focus only on electoral issues and
- (ix) The Mission noted concerns from stakeholders of insufficient civic and voter education by the EMBs. It was observed that there was inadequate election promotional material posted by the Electoral Commissioner of Mauritius encouraging people to vote or educating them on the voting process.

2.3 Gender and Youth Representation

The Mission noted that while women accounted for 51.3% of registered voters, only 18% represented 165 women candidates out of 891 nominated candidates that contested for National Assembly positions. In that regard, there appears to have been insufficient effort at the national

level and by political parties during these National Elections to address this imbalance.

According to the Electoral Commissioner, there were 73 political parties registered at the time of this election; however, only 29 parties fielded candidates. Out of the 891 nominated candidates, 273 nominated candidates were under 40 years of age, while the rest were over 40 years of age. There appears to have been insufficient effort by political parties during these elections to motivate women and youth participation in politics. Some stakeholders attributed the low participation of youth to their interest being more issue-based than party affiliation.

2.4 Role of the State-Owned Media and Media in general

The Mission noted that some stakeholders believed that the State-Owned Media is relatively independent and provides coverage to all political parties. In contrast, others expressed concern over the limited coverage provided to what is perceived as smaller political parties and how decision-makers in the private press influence their media coverage based on their party affiliation with very little objectivity.

Some stakeholders informed the Mission about a formula used to apportion airtime, which is only afforded to those who have fielded a minimum of six (6) candidates. The formula is said to have been determined by an independent actuary expert who has considered the number of candidates fielded and the number of returned candidates of a particular party. Some stakeholders believed that political parties and

candidates were aware of this formula and that the independent expert had conducted enough sensitisation. To this end, no complaints have been received.

Most stakeholders were concerned about the lack of access to social media for 24 hours during the electoral period, which was temporarily shut down. The Mission noted the clarification by the Government of Mauritius that the temporary shutdown of social media was due to national security. While Stakeholders understood that eliminating access to social media may be perceived at times as a necessary measure to stop disinformation. Stakeholders believed that candidates and political parties need social media to organise, assemble and communicate their electoral programmes. It was their view that it is, therefore, imperative that voters have access to information to enable them to make informed decisions.

4. OBSERVATIONS ON ELECTION DAY

On polling day, the SEOM observed the voting process and the performance of the Office of the Electoral Commission (OEC) in one hundred and eighty (180) polling stations distributed in all twenty-one (21) Constituencies of the Republic of Mauritius. The SEOM observed the following in all the polling stations visited :

- (a) The environment was calm and peaceful and SADC observers were granted free access.
- (b) 99% of the polling stations and their surroundings were free of campaign materials or visible campaign activities ;

- (c) 100% of the polling stations visited were adequately laid out with voters' roll displayed;
- (d) 98% of the polling stations observed opened on time, while 100% closed on time;
- (e) There were posters educating voters on the steps of voting posted outside 82% of the polling stations observed ;
- (f) Party agents and observers were present before and at the opening in 100% of the polling stations observed ;
- (g) In 100% of the polling stations observed, ballot boxes were locked and sealed adequately before voting started ;
- (h) In the polling stations observed, voters' identification documentation was checked against the voters' roll ;
- (i) 99% of the polling stations observed were accessible to all voters, including people with disabilities and the elderly and pregnant, who were prioritised ;
- (j) At 100% of the polling stations, voting proceeded without interruption;
- (k) At 94% of the polling stations, all voters were allowed to vote, while at 6% of the polling stations, some voters were not allowed to vote due to :

- Lack of appropriate national identification card ;
 - Being at the wrong polling station ;
 - Attempts to vote by proxy by Mauritians in the Diaspora ;
- (l) No formal complaints were lodged in 96% of the polling stations visited;
- (m) 100% of the polling stations visited had sufficient quantity of polling materials and were free of irregularities ;
- (n) Party agents and Candidates were allowed to follow closing procedures in 100% of the polling stations observed and reconciliation numbers were announced to all present in 79% of the polling stations observed; and
- (o) In 100% of the polling stations observed, the Presiding Officer reconciled the number of unused, used and spoilt ballots at the end of the day with the number of ballots received and other sensitive materials were packaged safely before handing them over to the returning officer;

5. RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENTS IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

- 5.1 At this juncture, allow me to recall that the SEOM is continuing the process of electoral observation in the post-election phase. As such, the Mission will not provide comprehensive recommendations or qualifications for the election at this stage.

5.2 The Mission presents the following recommendations for improvement by the relevant authorities and stakeholders. The first two of which emanate from the 2019 Report of the SEOM to Mauritius:

- (a) A concerted effort should be made to encourage women to stand as political candidates ;
- (b) Counting ballots at polling stations in line with the *SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections* ;

(c) **Management of the Electoral Process**

- (i) The OEC is urged to adopt information communication technology in the registration, capturing, management and dissemination of electoral data and information to improve the efficiency of the electoral process. Technology can improve transparency of the electoral process and confidence in the management of the elections to enhance democracy in Mauritius ;
- (ii) The Mission urges the Mauritius Government to consider the possibility of amending the electoral law to include the counting of votes and publication of provisional results at the Polling Stations; and
- (iii) The Mission recommends strengthening voter education in the country to ensure the effective participation of the Mauritian electorate in the electoral process.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the SEOM observed that the pre-election and voting phases of the 2024 National Assembly Elections were professionally organised and conducted orderly and peacefully, enabling the voters to express their democratic will.

The Mission commends the people of Mauritius for the political maturity, spirit of tolerance and calmness that generally prevailed during this electoral period. The Mission appeals to all contestants to channel their concerns through established legal procedures and processes in the event of any electoral disputes.

Following the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections (2021), our final report will be issued within thirty (30) days of this Preliminary Statement.

The SEAC shall return at an appropriate time to undertake a post-election review to determine the extent to which the recommendations of SEOM have been implemented and the nature of support, if any, that the Member State holding elections may require from the SADC region to implement those proposals.

Thank you very much!

Muito Obrigado!

Merci Beaucoup!

Asante Sana!