



EUROPEAN UNION ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION
STATEMENT BY THE CHIEF OBSERVER
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PRESS CONFERENCE, TUESDAY, 16 JUNE, HOTEL MALAIKA

This statement is available in English and Portuguese but only the English version is official.

Bissau, 16 June 2009

Good morning,

On behalf of the European Union Election Observation Mission, I would like to welcome all of you to our first press conference. It is a pleasure for me to be back to Guinea-Bissau as Chief Observer of the Mission, already for the third time. As you may remember I've been here with my Deputy Chief Observer, Tony Reis, for the presidential election of 2005 and the legislative elections of 2008.

For me it's like coming back home, although now the circumstances seem to be different. Despite the tragic and regrettable events of 2 March 2009, the European Union stood firm on its support, as pointed out by the president of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Durao Barroso, to peacefully resolve the situation in cooperation with other international organizations present in the region.

You will not see this time the same number of observers deployed; the fact the election was not foreseen and the unavailability of financial resources, at first, reduced the size of the mission, but quality is more important than quantity. The members of our mission are all experienced observers; most of them were here before. Then, let me introduce you to our Core Team: Tony, right next to me, the Deputy Chief Observer; Claudia Aranda, our Press Officer and in charge of Media Monitoring; Sylvie Blanchier, the Coordinator of Observers; and, Lars Lagergren, Legal and Electoral Expert. The Core Team is being supported by our implementing partner, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), represented by Nicolas Gomez, Project Coordinator, and Jose "Pepe" Guitian, Security and Operations Expert. Yesterday, a group of six Long Term Observers (LTOs) was deployed to different parts of the country to follow and monitor all electoral activities before, during and after election. The LTOs will be reinforced by 10 Short Term Observers (STOs) who will arrive next Sunday. So, we total 21 observers coming from 14 European Union member states.

I wish also to emphasize that the EU observation mission has a different methodology of work comparatively with other observation missions; our objective is not to observe the electoral act only

but most of the electoral process. We focus on the election preparations, the electoral campaign, the legal context and possible claims and complaints, the role of the media, the election day, counting and announcement of results.

Since our arrival we have met electoral and governmental officials, several candidates, heads of diplomatic missions and representatives from international organizations. Based on these meetings and on conversations with other electoral actors, we can identify two main concerns: the fragile security situation and the absence of a leveled playing field among the candidates.

The violations of human rights and assassinations and arbitrary arrests of political and military leaders compromise the institutional stability and security, creating a climate of fear, impunity and intimidation that may strongly affect and interfere with the normal development of the electoral process. Moreover, it also may negatively impact on the proper functioning of the legal institutions when dealing with electoral issues. The respect for all electoral stakeholders, including an independent judiciary, is a basic condition to hold democratic elections. It's imperative that voters, candidates and all electoral actors enjoy the conditions that allow for a peaceful and orderly electoral process.

Several candidates have expressed serious concerns not only regarding their own security, but also the inexistence of financial support and the use of state resources by others for electoral purposes. They also believe that the current situation of the media, financially unable to adequately cover the electoral process, harms both candidates and voters: candidates can't reach the voters, and voters can't find the information to make their choices.

Despite these circumstances and the very short period of time to put together an electoral process, the new members of the National Election Commission were able so far to create the logistical and technical conditions to organize the election on the 28th of June. The CNE has been conducting the process in a transparent and inclusive way, informing regularly the citizenry about their political and electoral rights, and involving the main political stakeholders in the decision making process.

There could be some apathy and indifference with the electoral process. However, I'd like to call on the Guineans to go to the polls on the 28th of June and exercise their democratic rights. Guinea-Bissau urgently needs an institutional normalization, a legitimization of its leadership to proceed with the efforts to bring stability and development to the country, through a free, peaceful and orderly electoral process. That is the reason why we are here.

Thank you very much