



Electoral Commission of Namibia

BRIEFING OF ELECTION OBSERVERS

(24 November 2015)

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CHAIRPERSON OF THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION OF NAMIBIA

ON THE ECN PREPAREDNESS FOR THE 2015 REGIONAL COUNCILS AND LOCAL
AUTHORITY ELECTIONS

Fellow Commissioners,

The Chief Electoral Officer – Prof Paul Isaak,

Representatives from the Embassy of the United States of America,

Representatives from European Union,

Technical Staff Members of the Independent Electoral Commission of Botswana,

Representatives of the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR),

Representative from the Namibia Institute for Democracy (NID),

Representative from Konrad Adenauer Stiftung,

Invited Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my distinct honor to welcome you all to Election House, on behalf of the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN). The purpose of this briefing is to brief you on how far the ECN as the Electoral Management Body (EMB) has progressed with its preparations for the upcoming elections.

At the onset, The Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN) is pleased to confirm that the ECN is indeed ready and well prepared to conduct the 2015 Regional Councils and Local Authority elections. This briefing will also highlight the milestones achieved, challenges encountered as well as measures taken in order to mitigate the challenges experienced since the last 2014 elections.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Sections 55 – 66 of the Electoral Act No.5 of 2014 provides for the ECN to invite observers to witness the Regional Councils and Local Authority elections. This is in line with the ECN's core value of transparency and our quest for international best practices.

1. SPECIAL VOTING

Distinguished Guests,

In terms of Section 98, election officials who will be on duty on Election Day outside the constituencies or local authority areas where they are registered as voters will be allowed to vote prior to the voting day. This category of officials include Coordinators, Assistant Coordinators, Returning Officers, Presiding Officers, Polling Officers and the Police Officers. This arrangements, also referred to as Authorization Voting, is also extended to other groups of eligible voters who might find themselves unable to cast their votes on voting day due to reason of employment, and is subjected to application and approval by the Chief Electoral Officer, as provided for in the Electoral Act.

The ECN is pleased to confirm and inform you that the **Special Voting** was successfully conducted on **Monday, 23rd November 2015**. The process commenced at 09:00 a.m. and was finalized at 19h00. The Presiding Officers counted, announced and posted the results of the poll at the respective polling stations as required in terms of the Electoral Act and these results will be collated with the rest of the results in the respective constituencies on the 27th November 2015.

2. BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE REGIONAL AND LOCAL AUTHORITY ELECTIONS IN NAMIBIA

The Regional Councils (RC) and Local Authority (LA) elections in Namibia are regulated in terms of the Regional Councils Act No. 22 of 1992 and the Local Authority Councils Act No. 23 of 1992. So far, the following four (4) sets of LA and RC elections have been held in an independent Namibia:

Elections Type	Election Dates
1992 RC & LA Elections	30 November – 03 December 1992
1998 LA Elections	16 February 1998
1998 RC Elections	30 November – 01 December 1998
2004 LA Elections	14 May 2004
2004 RC Elections	29 – 30 November 2004
2010 RC & LA Elections	26-27 November 2010

You will notice that the regional and local authority elections did not always take place at the same time. This is due to the fact that terms of office for representatives of the two elections were different. Following the passing of the Amendment Act 12 of 2010, the two elections were synchronized to take place simultaneously every five years and both elections were held together for the first time in the same year, on 26-27 November 2010. Thus, the 2015 local elections will be taking place against a proud historical record of Namibia having held its local elections timeously and consecutively without fail.

3. THE VOTER'S REGISTER

The voter's register is at the heart of any democratic election as it contains the eligible voters who are entitled to participate in that particular election. It is therefore critical that it is compiled accurately and that there is a mechanism to detect and remove the names of persons who were incorrectly registered as voters or those who were registered correctly but have passed on (died) in the intervening time between registration and polling day.

3.1 Supplementary Registration of Voters (SRV)

In this regard, the Electoral Commission is delighted to inform you that we have successfully concluded the **Supplementary Registration of Voters (SRV)** during the period **2nd – 22 August 2015**, during which a total of **74,034** voters (including duplicates) were registered, and this is in spite of the fact that most of the voters were registered during last year's General Registration of Voters (GRV).

Sections 31 of the Electoral Act, Act 5 of 2014 provides for the preparation and publishing of the provisional voters' register and Section 32 provides for the display, scrutiny and objections against names of persons included in the provisional voter's register. In this regard, a total of **292 display venues** were identified in all 14 regions. I wish to confirm that the regional councils and local authority provisional voter's registers were duly displayed during the period **21–25 September 2015** and that registered voters, registered political parties and registered political organizations were afforded the opportunity to subject provisional voter's registers to scrutiny and possible objection of names of persons in the registers who are not eligible to be registered as voters.

3.2 Representation before Electoral Tribunals

In terms of the Section 32 of the Electoral Act, any objections to the inclusion of names in the provisional register may be lodged with designated magistrate courts, which are now known as Electoral Tribunals. In this regard, fifteen (15) days, from **22 September to 12 October** were set aside for the representation of objections before the Electoral Tribunals.

3.3 Statement of case for decisions by Electoral Courts

The last day - ruling by Electoral Tribunal was **9 November 2015**. The final voter's registers was published in the Gazette on the **20th November 2015**. After the provisional voters' registers were displayed and subjected to public scrutiny, it is pleasing to note that **not one single objection was raised**.

Furthermore, **ladies and gentlemen**, the provisional voter's registers were subjected to a rigorous verification process before the final voter's register was published on 20th November 2015. The AFIS system which the ECN has introduced guarantees that fingerprints matching and other biometric data of voters will be thoroughly checked to eliminate duplicates and names of persons who are not supposed to be in the final register. As witnessed in the elections of last year, the accuracy and credibility of our voter's registers were not called into question. This fact that no objection has been recorded speaks to the **accuracy** and **integrity** of the final voters' registers.

The final national voters' register stands at a total number of **One Million Two Hundred and Sixty Seven Thousand, Three Hundred and Thirty Five (1, 267 335)** while the final local authority voters' register stands at **Four Hundred and Eighteen Thousand, Five Hundred and forty four (418, 544)**.

4. NOMINATION OF CANDIDATES

The submission of nomination of Independent Candidates for regional councils took place on the **14th October 2015**. In terms of Section 64(3) (a), the final day for the submission of nomination of regional councils and local authorities candidates by political parties (party lists) was on the **16th October 2015**.

The Nomination of Candidates took place in all 121 constituencies across the country. However, 26 of the 121 constituencies and 5 of the 57 local authorities will not be contested during the 2015 elections due to the fact that only one political party has nominated candidates in those constituencies and local authorities. This means that only 95 constituencies and 52 local authority areas will be contested in the upcoming elections.

5. THE ELECTRONIC VOTING MACHINES (EVMs)

5.1 First Level Check (FLC)

In terms of EVM Regulations, all the EVMs must be subjected to a **First Level Check (FLC)** before the voting machines are used to conduct an election. However, before the FLC took place, electoral data and all election results of the previous elections, including

the 2014 Presidential and National Assembly, were cleared from the EVM's. Over 3105 EVMs underwent FLC during the period **23 October to 07 November** in order to ensure that they are in good working order. In terms of the EVM regulations, political parties must be invited to witness the FLC and are entitled to inspect the EVMs if they so wish. The Namibian Police (NAMPOL) and political parties were indeed invited to monitor this process as a matter of transparency.

5.2 Preparation of the EVMs by Returning Officers

In terms of the EVM regulations, each Returning Officer is responsible for the preparation of the EVMs for his/her constituency/local authority. The preparation of EVMs took place during the period 17-29 October 2015. This process entailed configuring the EVM's in accordance with the specific RC and LA elections to be contested in that specific constituency or local authority.

6. CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED DURING 2014 ELECTIONS AND MITIGATING STRATEGIES TAKEN TO AVOID SAME DURING 2015 ELECTIONS

6.1 Shortage Transport Vehicles

The ECN submitted the transport requirements to the government and set a deadline of **9 November 2015** as a date by which the Government vehicles should be secured. The deadline also serves as trigger mechanism, whereby the ECN should activate an alternative Plan B to acquire private vehicles on a contract basis. As was anticipated, the required number of Government vehicles was not secured by the deadline and Plan B has already been activated to ensure that an adequate number of vehicles is available on Election Day. We are happy to note that we have secured the sufficient number of vehicles through the Plan B strategy which will enable the process to run smoothly.

6.4 Handheld Voter Verification Devices (VVDs)

Some challenges were experienced when the ECN deployed Handheld Voter Verification Devices (VVDs) at polling stations across the country during last year's Presidential and National Assembly elections. The VVDs were deployed in order to verify and authenticate

all voters at polling stations before allowing them to cast their votes. The entire national voter's roll is loaded on each verification device with all the biometric data of the voters. This technology was meant to allow for faster verification of voters than the manual verification using the paper voter's roll and it was expected to immensely shorten the time voters have to spend in queues at polling stations. However, the VVDs did not live up to expectations. Instead, some would argue that it actually contributed to the long queues that were experienced.

The post mortem investigations into the VVDs poor performance which the ECN held immediately after the national elections of last year has revealed that the VVDs in themselves did not cause the delays, but that the operators errors in handling these devices actually was the main cause of the delays. It was found that, due to the late delivery of the VVDs by the supplier there, there was insufficient time to train the operators of the devices. There was insufficient time to conduct pilot tests on the devices in order for the operators to gain experience in handling the devices before deployment.

In order to avoid the delays and long queues experienced last year, the ECN has identified proper and **adequate training of operators as a priority**. The software of the VVD has also been upgraded in order to speed up the verification of voters at polling stations. In the meantime, the ECN has used the VVDs during many by-elections thereby affording the operators ample time to gain the necessary operating skills and confidence in handling the devices. The ECN has taken the necessary measures and is therefore confident, that the delays and long queues will be something of the past, come polling day on 27 November 2015.

7. DEPLOYMENT OF ELECTION MATERIAL

As we speak, the ECN wishes to confirm that both sensitive and non-sensitive election material has already been dispatched to the regions ready for deployment on Election Day.

8. DEPLOYMENT STATISTICS, INCLUDING ELECTION OFFICIALS

The RC and LA is a massive operation, and the statistics below speak for themselves:

Total number of Election officials	10,579
Total number of Teams	1,938
Total number of EVMs to be deployed	2,540
Total number of Constituencies Contested	95 (out of 121)
Total number of uncontested Constituencies	26
Total Number of Local Authority Contested	52 (out of 57)
Total Number of uncontested Local Authorities	5
Estimated number of officials at the CERC	98

9. CENTRAL ELECTION RESULT CENTER (CERC) OPERATIONS

Ladies and Gentlemen, In terms of the Electoral Act No.5 of 2014 the RC and LA election results shall be preliminary announced at the constituency centers by the Returning Officers. However, the same Act also provides for the election results to be endorsed by the Chairperson of the Commission. In practical terms, this means an establishment of a Central Election Result Center (CERC) at the ECN head office, where the Regional Councils and Local Authorities election results shall be officially announced and disseminated to the media. It is envisaged that a similar result center similar to last year's CERC will be established.

10. IN CONCLUSION

All in all I can confidently report to you that the 2015 RC and LA elections got off to a good start with the Special Voting conducted on the 23 November 2015. Despite some media reports the ECN notes that the election campaign so far has generally been peaceful and a calm atmosphere has prevailed across the country. No incidents of violence or

intimidation have been officially reported to the ECN. The ECN is urging every eligible Namibia voter to go in droves to the polling points to cast their votes. This is an opportunity availed to the electorate to elect their local representatives who will be charged with the responsibility of dealing with the “**bread and butter**” issues which affect the ordinary citizens of this country. Therefore these elections should be regarded with the seriousness it deserves.

The ECN wishes to acknowledge and encourage the role played by leaders at the national, regional and local authority levels who have joined the ECN in a joint effort to popularize the Regional Councils and Local Authority elections. Equally the ECN acknowledge the important role being played by other stakeholders including the media and civil society organization, Namibian Police and Community Leaders. It is hoped that the presence of local and international election observers will add value to the outcome of the two election by ensuring that the election process is observed, reassuring and boosting confidence of the voters as well as evaluating the fairness, transparency and credibility of the election results. The Commission values your feedback and looks forward in receiving your observation reports on the process. The Commission wishes you well with your tasks at hand.

On that note, I hope and trust that we shall have a successful 2015 Regional Councils and Local Authority elections come 27 November.

I THANK YOU.
