



Electoral Commission of Namibia

**REMARKS BY ADV. NOTEMBA TJIPUEJA,
CHAIRPERSON OF THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION OF NAMIBIA
ON THE OCCASION OF BRIEFING ELECTION OBSERVERS FOR THE 2020
REGIONAL COUNCILS AND LOCAL AUTHORITY ELECTIONS
Central Election Results Centre (CERC), Ground Floor, Election House
19th November 2020**

Fellow Commissioners,

The Chief Electoral Officer – Theo Mujoro,

Representatives from various Embassies and High Commissions,

Representatives from various Civil Society Organizations,

Members of the Media

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 the invitation is to brief you on how far the ECN, as the Electoral Management Body, has progressed with its preparations for the upcoming elections. Later on in this briefing, the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) will provide a detailed update on ECN's preparedness for the 2020 RC and LA elections. My statement will focus on two aspects, namely, the importance of election observation and voter turnout during RC and LA 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 to inculcate international best practices in our electoral processes. As you might be aware, however, the international and regional election observer missions are unable to travel to Namibia to observe the elections due to travel restrictions and health concerns brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, in spite of travel and health concerns posed by COVID-19, it is pleasing to note that the international community is well represented here this morning. In this regard, I wish to recognize the presence of representatives from the following embassies and High Commissions: **Embassy of Angola, Botswana High Commission, British High Commission, EU Delegation, Ghana High Commission, Embassy of Japan, Embassy of the United States of America, Embassy of Venezuela, and Embassy of Zimbabwe.** I also would like to recognize representatives from the following Civil Society Organizations: **Public Policy Research (IPPR), NANGOF, Friedrich-Ebert Foundations, Democratic Trust of Namibia, Hanns Seidel Foundation Namibia, Namibia Institute for Democracy (NID), and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.**

The Commission is pleased to confirm, up front, that the ECN is indeed ready and well-prepared to conduct the 2020 Regional Councils (RC) and Local Authority (LA) elections. All indications are that we can expect a particularly competitive regional and local authority election in this election season. No less than eighteen (18) political parties and thirteen (13) associations are contesting in 121 constituencies and 57 Local Authority areas. A total number of 502 candidates, of which 92 are Independent candidates, will compete in all constituencies. Notable is the unprecedented number of independent candidates and associations taking part in these elections.

The ECN notes that the election campaign so far has generally been peaceful and a calm atmosphere has prevailed across the country. No serious incidents of acts of violence have been officially reported to the ECN.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentleman

The Regional Councils and Local Authority 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 five (5) 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
2015 RC & LA Elections	27 November 2015

You may recall that the Regional and Local Authority elections have not always taken place at the same time. This is due to the fact that the 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 2020 local elections will be taking place against a proud historical record of Namibia having held its Regional and Local elections timeously and consecutively without fail.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Now I turn to the importance of election observation. The concise definitions of Election Observation is to be found in two reputable sources. The *Declaration of the Principles for international Election Observation (Declaration)* defines international election observation as “*the systematic, comprehensive and accurate gathering of information concerning the laws, processes and institutions related to the conduct of elections and other factors concerning the overall electoral environment; the impartial and professional analysis of such information*”, while the *Code of Conduct for International Election Observers (Code of Conduct)* commits

international election observers to, among others things to, "*maintain Accuracy of Observations and Professionalism in Drawing Conclusions*" and to "*observe the highest level of professional conduct at all times, including leisure time*".

In these definitions, the importance of election observation is highlighted by three operative words, namely, (i) **impartiality**, (ii) **accuracy**, (iii) **professionalism**. To these three words, other sources have added other aspects of election observation (iv) **training** of election observers and (v) the ability to **detect** and **deter** electoral irregularities.

Impartiality is a very important concept in election observation and the Commission expects all election observers to be impartial.

The Commission expects election observers to utilize **accurate** information and analyze the information in a consistent manner. The criticism raised against election observation missions has been that the information available to election observers is inaccurate or inconsistently analyzed. It can be argued that election observation exercises remain so superficial that conclusions are either too vague or empirically inaccurate.

For instance, some election observers are accused of making assessments of the polls without being present at the count, which is one of the most critical phases of the electoral process. It is revealed in some studies on election observation that some observers base their conclusions on cursory fact-finding efforts, even offering public assessments before ballots are counted based on personal observations of a few outsiders who make brief visits to a handful of polling stations.

Another important element of this criticism has been that election observers are **too focused on the Election Day**, although it is the thorough preparation of elections in the pre-electoral phase that contribute immensely to delivering a credible election. In certain instances, a longer term presence is necessary to ensure that all aspects of the process are taken into account, thereby adding credibility to the findings.

Distinguished Guests,

Thirdly, the Commission expects election observers to act in a professional manner at all times. **Professionalism** in election observation means that electoral observation practices need to be consolidated, observation techniques need to be systematized, and a standardized follow-up and assessment criteria for observed electoral processes needs to be utilized, in order to reinforce objectivity and to observe the highest standards of professionalism.

Training of election observers is also very important. It is expected of election observer missions to train their election observers. Most election observer missions today select their election observers from a roster of experts. Many election observer missions require that election observers complete one or more trainings before they are added to the roster. Nearly all election observer missions organize briefings of their election observers after they arrive in the country but before they are deployed to their areas of observation. Such briefings often also include workshops, where the election observers are taken through the voting process.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

The presence of election observers is considered key for the purpose of **detecting** and **deterring** electoral irregularities. Unfortunately, many international observers put undue emphasis on election administration on Election Day, without considering other important aspects of the electoral cycle.

Furthermore, the **importance of domestic election observation** is increasingly being recognized. Domestic election observation missions can be more accurate than some international election observer missions because their costs per election observer deployed are lower, which means that they can afford to deploy many more election observers than international election observer missions, even if they have less financial resources available.

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I now wish to highlight the importance of **voter turnout** in RC and LA elections. Namibia has historically experienced a low voter turnout during RC and LA elections. Apart from the first RC and LA elections held in 1992, which experienced a 92% voter turnout, the voter turnout of subsequent RC and LA has been consistently lower. For example, during the 2015 RC and LA elections only a 39% and 33% voter turnout was recorded, respectively. The most recent constituency by-elections held in January 2020 in Otjiwarongo and Opuwo rural recorded 25% and 42% voter turnout, respectively. Most notably, however, was the Khomasdal constituency by-election which was also held during the same period, January 2020, where the lowest voter turnout ever of 8.2 % was recorded in Namibian elections.

It is against this background that the Commission has been calling for corroborative efforts by all electoral stakeholders, including political parties, media and Civil Society to take up the challenge in redoubling our collective efforts to ensure adequate voter and civil education, and to ensure adequate dissemination of electoral information to every eligible voter. The objective of voter and civil education is to increase voter turnout as well as the correct marking of ballot papers with the view to minimizing the number of rejected ballots.

In Conclusion, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is very important that election observer missions take responsibility for their assessments; to promote inclusive electoral systems; to ensure consistency in the assessments made and to follow up on previous assessments; to avoid making public statements before the election results have been announced; and to publish the final mission report in a timely manner.

The hope and expectation is that the involvement of local and international diplomatic missions in election observation will add value to the outcome of the two elections 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 to receiving your observation reports on the process.

The ECN is urging every eligible Namibian voter to go out 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 they deserve.

Last but not least, the Commission wishes to acknowledge and encourage the role played by leaders at the national, regional and local authority levels to join the ECN in an effort to popularize the Regional Councils and Local Authority elections.

Equally the ECN acknowledges the important role being played by other stakeholders including the media and civil society organization, the Namibian Police and Community Leaders. On that note, I hope and trust that we shall have a successful 2020 Regional Councils and Local Authority elections come 25 November.

I THANK YOU.
