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OBSERVATION MISSION SUMMARY
INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVER MISSION
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF THE MALDIVES
HELD ON SATURDAY, 9TH SEPTEMBER 2023.

Mahinda Deshapriya,

Retired Commissioner of Elections, Department of Elections (2011-2015)
Former Chairman of the Election Commission of Sri Lanka (2015-2020)
Former Chairman of the Delimitation Commission of Sri Lanka (2021-2023)
Current Chairman, Association of Election Professionals of Ceylon (AEPC)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In September 2023, I, Mahinda Deshapriya, Retired Commissioner of Elections , Former Chairman of the Election Commission and the Delimitation Commission of Sri Lanka, chaired the International Election Observer Mission deployed to the Republic of the Maldives , at the invitation of the Chairman of the Election Commission of Maldives (ECM), to observe the Presidential Elections held on Saturday, 9th September 2023.

The International Election Observer Mission was comparatively huge. Accreditation was given to the following 181 representatives of the international agencies and organizations mentioned beneath.

Election Management Bodies and relevant organizations

1. Chairman, Association of Election Professionals of Ceylon, Sri Lanka
2. Central Election Commission, Georgia
3. Central Election Commission, Uzbekistan
4. Commission on Elections, Philippines
5. Election Commission of Bhutan
6. Election Commission of India
7. Election Commission of Sri Lanka
8. Election Commission of Thailand
9. Election Commissions of Pakistan
10. Electoral Commission, South Africa
11. Independent Election Commission, Jordan
12. National Elections Commission, South Korea
13. Supreme Electoral Tribunal, El Salvador
14. Tribunal de Justicia Electoral (Honduras)

Embassies/High Commissions/Foreign Missions

1. Australian High Commission to the Republic of Maldives
2. Embassy of Japan in Maldives
3. Embassy of the People's Republic of China
4. High Commission of Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka
5. High Commission of India in Maldives
6. High Commission of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan
7. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan

Other organizations

1. Asia Middle East Center for Research and Dialogue (AMEC)
2. Bolton County, United Kingdom
3. Commonwealth Observer Group *
4. Dipendra Kandel Initiative, Nepal
5. Election and Voter Service, United States
6. Election Monitoring Forum, Bangladesh
7. European Union Election Observation Mission**
8. House of Commons, United Kingdom
9. International Center for Parliamentary Studies (ICPS)
10. International Parliamentarians Congress, Pakistan
11. International Republican Institute, USA
12. SNAS Africa, Cameroon

The Commonwealth Observer Group* and the European Union Election Observation Mission (EUEOM) ** had separate missions while the foreign missions staff carried out separate observations.

There were eight presidential candidates contesting at the Election. Given beneath are the names of candidates and their respective parties:

- Ibrahim Mohamed Solih (Maldivian Democratic Party)
- Mohamed Muizzu (People's National Congress)
- Qasim Ibrahim (Jumhooree Party)
- Ilyas Labeeb (The Democrats)
- Mohamed Nazim (Maldives National Party)
- Umar Naseer (Independent)
- Faris Maumoon (Independent)
- Hassan Zameel (Independent)

This ensured the election was competitive and gave voters a genuine electoral choice.

Of the total Population of 520,621 the number of eligible voters as on 9th September 2023 are 282,395. The election was held against the backdrop of a number of challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic, rising inflation, and political instability. The outcome of the election will have a significant impact on the future of Maldives.

The 2023 Presidential election in Maldives is a critical election that will have a significant impact on the future of the country. The outcome of the election will depend on the ability of the candidates to address the key issues facing the Maldives and to convince the voters that they are the best person to lead the country.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The legal framework for the election is based on the Constitution of Maldives, the Elections Act, and the Presidential Elections Regulation.

The Constitution of Maldives provides for a presidential system of government, with the president being the head of state and government. The president is elected by direct popular vote for a term of five years.

The Elections Act sets out the details of the electoral process, including the registration of voters, the nomination of candidates, the campaign period, and the voting and counting process.

The Presidential Elections Act provides additional details on the electoral process, such as the qualifications for candidates, the campaign financing rules, and the procedures for resolving disputes.

The following are some of the key provisions of the legal framework for the election:

- Only citizens of Maldives who are at least 18 years old and have been resident in the Maldives for at least one year are eligible to vote.
- Candidates for president must be citizens of Maldives who are at least 35 years old and have been resident in the Maldives for at least 10 years.
- The campaign period for the election is 21 days.
- Voting is compulsory for all eligible voters.
- The election is held using a two-round system. If no candidate receives a majority of the votes in the first round, a runoff election is held between the two highest-polling candidates.

The Elections Commission of Maldives (ECM) is an independent government body established in 2008 to ensure that all elections in the Maldives adhere to democratic values enabling maximum public participation in an independent, just, transparent election process.

The ECM is responsible for the conduct of all elections in Maldives, including presidential, parliamentary, and local council elections. It is also responsible for voter registration, election financing, and resolving election disputes.

The ECM is composed of five members who are appointed by the President of Maldives. The members of the ECM are required to be independent and impartial.

The ECM has a number of powers and functions, including:

- Registering voters
- Nominating candidates
- Conducting elections
- Overseeing the campaign period
- Counting votes
- Declaring the results of elections
- Resolving election disputes

The ECM is an important institution in the Maldives' democracy. It is responsible for ensuring that all elections are free, fair, and credible. The ECM has been praised for its work in recent years, and it is seen as a model for other countries in the region.

The voter registration system in Maldives is administered by the Elections Commission of Maldives (ECM). The ECM is responsible for registering all eligible voters, issuing voter cards, and maintaining the voter rolls.

Voter Registration System

To register to vote, an individual must be a citizen of Maldives who is at least 18 years old and has been resident in the Maldives for at least one year. They can register online or at any of the ECM's offices. The voter rolls are updated regularly to reflect changes in the population. The ECM conducts a general voter registration every five years.

The number of registered voters in Maldives has been increasing steadily in recent years. This is due to a number of factors, including the growth of the population and the increasing awareness of the importance of voting.

The 2023 Presidential election is a closely contested election. The outcome of the election will have a significant impact on the future of Maldives. The high number of registered voters is a positive sign for the democratic process in the Maldives.

Effective use of ICT in voter registration and voter awareness are commendable feats undertaken by the Election Commission.

Under the new legal arrangements, to participate in an election a citizen must be registered to vote. Most citizens were registered to vote in the island in which they are entered in the local civil register (i.e. their 'home island'). However, the Maldives has a highly mobile population, and in fact many citizens actually reside on islands other than the one holding their civil registration e.g. in Male' or one of the resort islands. The General Elections Act provides that the EC should register electors who are away from their home island, enabling them to vote on the island where they will be on election day.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

1. Polling Efficiency : Voters were quite eager to vote even before the voting started, at times there were more than 50-60 voters in queues in the mid noon hours despite the scorching heat. The election was conducted with exceptional efficiency. The process was well-organized, ensuring a smooth voting experience for citizens.

2. Peaceful Environment : The election unfolded in an atmosphere of tranquility and peace, fostering a conducive environment for democratic participation and engagement.

Well positioned barricades 50 m radius around the perimeter of the polling stations, police's contribution in maintaining law and order in and outside the polling stations, minimal disruptions noted which were easily resolved by the monitors and police personnel.

3. Logistical Excellence : The logistical arrangements for the election were executed flawlessly, reflecting meticulous planning and execution in an archipelago with different geographical conditions.

4. Support for International Observers : International observers received excellent facilities and support. The liaison officers could be relied and demonstrated remarkable professionalism in assisting observers throughout all the stages in the process.

5. Commendable services : The Election Commission of Maldives deserves commendation for orchestrating a well-organized and transparent which in all spheres displayed free, fair and credible election.

6. Innovative Accessibility : The introduction of ballot paper stencils for visually impaired voters is a commendable initiative, enhancing inclusivity in the electoral process.

7. Effective use of technology : Another notable feature was the effective use of I C T which had immensely contributed as a platform for voter registration, education and awareness. Declaration of national results, poll as well as counting accuracy, through effective use of technology have made it transparent , credible as well as commendable.

8. Gender Inclusivity : The overwhelming participation of female poll workers and their roles as in-charge at polling stations, counting staff, and also fairly large amounts of polling and counting agents is a positive indicator of gender inclusivity in the electoral process even though there were no female members of the Election Commission or female candidates.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Civic and Voter Education : It is crucial to invest further in civic and voter education initiatives to ensure that citizens are well-informed about the election process and their rights. All the campaigns for Register to vote, make sure to see your name on roll, were very effective and also must be done in greater proportions through print, electronic and social media, sms, parents through school children, poster displays in public and private enterprises, transportation modes and jetties. We noted as some weren't aware of the convenience in locating their polling stations through their mobile devices.
2. Poll Worker Training : In some instances, we observed deviations from established procedures by poll workers. Strengthening poll worker training programs is essential to maintain consistency and adherence to election protocols.
3. Although there were two cubicles (voting compartments) in each and every polling station, only one was used. If both were cubicles were used, long queuing outside in the hot sun could have been prevented.
4. It is highly recommended if there were dedicated for the disabled or for wheel chair users or pregnant mothers or mothers carrying babies. We recommend the positioning of ramps at polling stations where it is much needed.
5. A senior officer must have been appointed as the focal point in a cluster polling station, he/she could have intervened if there is any delay in the process and also to resolve any grievances or issues, assist voters in locating their polling stations etc.
6. During the counting, it seemed there was an under-utilization of staff when three officers were busy counting while the other three were idling. This must be prevented.
7. The need for a secretariat for the observers was felt as we had fairly less access for document preparation and printing etc., it would have been better if there was a pre-deployment discussion either informally, the poll staff was not aware of the presence of the observers, liaison officers should have introduced the observers to the polling staff.

We recommend some form of rectification, regulation, or an effort to minimize or prevent repetition of some of the mistakes, negligent behavior that could have been avoided but weren't able to do so due to the busy and highly stressful nature of managing an election nationwide.

In general, the ECM and all the stakeholders executed their tasks energetically and sought to comply with its responsibilities in a generally transparent and professional manner in creating a conducive environment for a free, fair and credible election thus safeguarding the three pillars of the Electoral Democracy,

1. Delimitation – non relevant in this instance as the entire Republic is a single electorate,
2. Registration of Electors- have been done so well as there weren't many complaints
3. Conducting the Elections. – The election is completed when poll, count and result tabulation are taken together the credit should go to all the stakeholders, irrespective of gender or capacity for putting together their greatest contribution in making their nation proud in conducting not only free, fair and most importantly, credible elections. “Kudos to everyone who put the event together”.

In line with our terms of reference, we have completed our task and submit this report for your consideration. This report reflects our observations and insights into the 2023 Maldives Presidential Election, attempts to set out the context of the elections and explain our work in pursuance of the task assigned to us.

We think other Governments and International agencies should support this initiative and provide assistance to Maldives. In addition to providing our observations on the electoral process, our report also includes information which could assist Election Commission of Maldives to meet the challenges they face.

Last but not least, we express our appreciation to the Election Commission of the Republic of Maldives and the people of Maldives for the invitation to observe their elections and for their assistance in carrying out our mandate. We hope that the findings of our mission are taken in the spirit in which they are intended and we look forward to Maldives responding positively to the recommendations.

FW: Election Observation Report

Hawwa Ziuna

Mon 10/9/2023 9:32 AM

To: Info Email Shared <info@elections.gov.mv>;

📎 1 attachment

PRES OB MALDIVES REPORT.pdf;

Entry



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-----Original Message-----

From: Hawwa Ziuna <hawwaziuna@gmail.com>

Sent: Monday, October 9, 2023 9:31 AM

To: Hawwa Ziuna <ziuna.2490@elections.gov.mv>

Subject: Election Observation Report

Attached is the Election Observation Report for the 2023 Presidential Election of Maldives by the Chief Observer sent via WhatsApp