

# **ELECTORAL OBSERVER MISSION**

*PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION  
Of September 9, 2023*



## **PRELIMINARY STATEMENT**



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MALE, September 9, 2023

## I- INTRODUCTION

*On September 9, 2023, the Republic of Maldives, an archipelago in the Indian Ocean, popular for its luxury tourism, held a new presidential election since the air of political pluralism adopted in 2008. The country has remarkable experience in democratic elections and peaceful activities carried out regularly, in accordance with its national and international obligations, after having been administered by a single party since the end of its status as a British protectorate in 1965.*

**SNAS AFRICA**, after being accredited by the Maldivian electoral commission, mobilized for this electoral mission a team of (07) seven electoral experts from several African countries.

The **SNAS AFRICA** Electoral Observation Mission assessed the presidential election of September 9, 2023 in the Republic of Maldives in accordance with the obligations and requirements required by international standards based on democratic elections, good governance, and respect for human rights. As well as other relevant international instruments and the Maldivian national legal framework governing elections.

## II- OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY OF THE MISSION

*The main objective of **SNAS AFRICA** is to carry out an independent and impartial assessment of the presidential election in*

*accordance with the relevant instruments in force and international standards governing democratic elections.*

*In this regard, the mission organized an information and orientation session for observers before their deployment to the field on September 6, 2023.*

*The mission held consultations with key electoral stakeholders, including the Electoral Commission, government authorities, candidates, security forces, media representatives, and diplomatic corps.*

*The mission has also exchanged closely with Commonwealth observers, Asia Middle East Center for Research and Dialogue, Nepal Law Society, Embassy Ofjapan, European Union Election Observation Maldives 2023, European Commission, Nagashi Relief and Development Berhad, International Parliamentarians Congress and a few organizations local.*

*This statement presents the preliminary conclusions of the mission on the pre-electoral phase, polling day including the opening of polls, voting, closing, counting and the official results of the first round. It also makes some preliminary recommendations.*

*The mission will continue to observe the process leading to the second round on September 30 which will proclaim the democratically elected president.*

### **III - POLITICAL CONTEXT**

*The mission notes that the presidential election of September 9, 2023 took place in a climate of calm and serenity. Despite the polarization of the Maldivian political landscape by a historic*

number of eight (08) candidacies in the presidential election. The election campaign was largely peaceful and peaceful.

However, the mission observed that the status quo prevailed since the advent of multi-party democracy, and the entire election campaign was dominated by the two candidates supported by the main political parties in the Maldives.

The result of the first round of this presidential election is seen as potentially likely to highlight the two heavyweights of the local political landscape

#### IV – ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF VOTING

**SNAS AFRICA** noted that the electoral commission excelled at the organizational level by making the electoral lists available in front of all polling stations. The delivery and dispatch within respectable deadlines of electoral materials in all polling stations.

Considering the participation rate, 79.39% (first round), the Mission noted the need to encourage voter participation in the vote in order to preserve the legitimacy of the elected president.

#### V – MISSION ACTIVITIES

In carrying out its mandate, the mission will meet several authorities and institutions including:

The President of the Republic of Maldives

The President of the National Assembly

The Minister of Foreign Affairs

The President and members of the Electoral Commission

*The media*

*Other international electoral observation missions deployed on the ground*

*The Mission also participated in a technical preparatory meeting organized by the electoral commission for all international observer groups deployed in the Maldives for the presidential election.*

## **VI - COMPLIANCE OF THE ELECTION WITH THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

*The legal framework for the 2023 presidential election includes the current Constitution, the electoral law in force and the law on social communication. The Republic of Maldives has also ratified several international instruments relating to democratic elections.*

*The mission notes respect for gender and youth parity in the management of the electoral process at all levels of organization and participation. Respect for equal rights and duties between men and women in terms of political participation and access to public decision-making positions.*

## **VII – ADMINISTRATION OF ELECTIONS**

*The Electoral Commission is the constitutional body with full administrative and regulatory powers to manage voter registration and elections.*

*According to the Maldives Election Commission, 282,395 people are eligible to vote in this election and among them, around 27,000 people will be voting for the first time after reaching the age of 18.*

*Voting is also taking place in the southern Indian state of Kerala, as well as in the capitals of Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Britain and the United Arab Emirates, where the Maldivian diaspora is significant.*

## **VIII – ENVIRONMENT OF THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN**

*Under the supervision of the electoral commission which ensured compliance with campaign regulations, it took place in the best possible conditions. Fundamental freedoms of expression, assembly, association and movement were generally respected during the campaign period. The candidates were able to present their programs, allowing voters to make an informed choice. Most stakeholders still considered that the campaign was peaceful.*

*The atmosphere grew in intensity a few days before the election, with rallies, banners, campaign posters, billboards, and vehicles campaigning. This trend was observed mainly for the two candidates supported by the two parties that dominate the national political landscape. Other candidates used door-to-door canvassing and small-scale neighborhood-level meetings to canvass for votes.*

## **X – CITIZEN OBSERVATION**

*Having ratified international instruments promoting citizen observation of elections, the legal framework of the Republic of Maldives addresses the issue of national observation of elections which is an essential element to strengthen and sustain democratic governance. Citizen observer groups have control of the field and the political context. They are key actors who contribute to the transparency and credibility of the electoral process.*

## XI - PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN AND YOUTH

*The legal framework guarantees the political participation of women and young people. The parity law promotes the inclusion of women in political processes.*

*The mission was very pleased to note the participation in large numbers of young people and women and their overall involvement in the electoral process.*

## XII - ASSISTANCE FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH DISABILITIES

*Although the Mission did not have access to reliable official data relating to people living with disabilities in the Maldives, electoral legislation recognizes the political rights of these people, in line with the country's commitments under the Convention on Disabilities. Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).*

*Unfortunately, the mission saw nothing put in place to facilitate the mobility of these people inside and outside the polling stations.*

## XIII - OBSERVATIONS ON VOTING DAY

**SNAS AFRICA** deployed its observers in a few dozen polling stations in the male capital in the company of liaison officers from the electoral commission and the collaboration was perfect.

*After observing the main stages of the vote, the **SNAS AFRICA** electoral observation mission made the following conclusions:*

*The opening of the polling stations took place calmly, peacefully and serenely.*

*The majority of polling stations covered by the mission opened at the prescribed time, delays of up to 15 minutes noted, concern 11% of stations visited, this delay was due to the late arrangement.*

*Likewise, in all the polling stations visited by our teams, the electoral staff were present and the equipment was complete in all the polling stations visited at the opening.*

*No campaign activity or attempt to buy voters was noted around the voting centers.*

*The members of the polling stations were in the majority of cases women and young people. The mission welcomes this incentive measure encouraging the recruitment of women and young people as electoral agents.*

*Overall, the skills of polling station staff and the behavior of security personnel were rated satisfactory.*

*The progress of voting operations was observed in most of the polling stations visited on election day, among which 99.4% of them were arranged in such a way as to allow orderly and transparent voting.*

*The ballot boxes were properly sealed and placed in a manner visible to the public.*

*Voting secrecy was preserved in the polling stations observed. Likewise, in all polling stations, voters were required to present either their national identity cards, passport or any other identity document. Voters' identity documents were checked against the electoral list in all polling stations.*



*The presence of candidate representatives in the polling stations observed was respectively at an effective level.*

*In all the polling stations visited, the voter's finger was marked in ink and no formal complaint was received by the presidents of the polling stations. The representatives of the candidates as well as the international observers met carried out their tasks with professionalism and without intimidation.*

*In the majority of cases, the atmosphere outside the polling stations was peaceful, voting procedures were observed and the vote took place in a reasonable manner.*

*Satisfactory and the environment around the polling stations visited was calm, without any sign of tension.*

*The presence of security forces was observed in all polling stations, and this presence was considered discreet and professional.*

*The majority of polling stations respected the closing time and the counting followed in full clarity in the presence of all stakeholders. The seals of the ballot boxes were checked, the ballots were counted and verified in accordance with the counting procedures.*

*Likewise, in all the offices observed, no interference in the process was noted during the counting of votes and no interruption of the counting was observed. The minutes drawn up at the end of the vote counting operations were signed by the members of the polling station and a copy of the results form was given to the representatives of the candidates present. The voting results from the polling stations were posted after the count.*

Overall, the skills of the members of the polling stations, during the closing and throughout the counting of votes, were judged efficient and satisfactory.

**SNAS AFRICA** observed an increase in the voter participation rate in the presidential election of September 9, 2023 compared to the previous presidential election.

#### XIV- CONCLUSION

The presidential election of September 9, 2023, the second to be organized in a peaceful context, thus demonstrating a commitment of the administrative and electoral authorities to continue efforts for democratic consolidation in the Republic of Maldives.

Electoral participation, which constituted a major challenge and issue of this presidential election, resulted in a renewed interest of Maldives voters who traveled to exercise their right to vote.

**SNAS AFRICA** congratulates all these citizens for having contributed to a regression of the strong abstention observed previously.

**SNAS AFRICA** salutes the electoral commission for their technical and operational skills which resulted in the conduct of a transparent and honest ballot

**SNAS AFRICA** welcomes the general climate of peace in which this electoral event took place and calls on the high civic sense of the Maldivian people and political actors to preserve this climate of tranquility until the announcement of the final results by the competent authorities and resort to legal recourse in the event of possible contestation of the results.

*In view of the preliminary findings made by its teams of short-term observers, the mission would like to make the following preliminary recommendations:*

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

*To the government: Introduce into the electoral law restrictions on the use of public means and property for campaign purposes.*

*In Parliament: Revise the relevant legal texts in order to formally recognize the right of civil society to participate in the electoral process through citizen observation, awareness-raising and electoral education in accordance with the international and regional commitments of the Republic of the Maldives in this regard. matter.*

*Intensify voter awareness with a view to further mobilizing populations on the principle of their participation in the vote.*

*Continue to promote civic and electoral education in schools, secondary schools and universities with a view to broad mobilization of young people on the principle of their participation in the vote.*

*Formalize and encourage the involvement of civil society in electoral education and awareness with a view to greater citizen mobilization for the vote.*

*Make slightly more personalized urns*

*Establish facilities for the movement of disabled and elderly people within the polling station for the expression of their civic duty*

*To Civil Society: Carry out advocacy actions before Parliament with a view to modifying the relevant legal texts for the formal recognition of citizen electoral observation.*

*Initiate consultations with relevant electoral stakeholders for the formal inclusion of civil society in the electoral process as well as for its participation in national efforts to promote citizen participation and the consolidation of democracy.*

*Finally **SNAS AFRICA** asks the government to make efforts ranging from the sense of support for civil society organizations which deploy on their own funds and in most cases to the sacrifice of their family to travel from their country of residence by mobilizing own funds to support the multiple brothers of the Maldives in the consolidation of their democratic process, a guarantee of good governance, stability and economic propriety*

*Done in MALÉ, September 11, 2023*

*For the Mission,*

**THE HEAD OF MISSION**

**GUY BERTRAN CHSEMO**  
ELECTION EXPERT  
CERTIFIED SHORT TERM ELECTION OBSERVERS  
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