

Maldives Presidential Election 2023 (Run-Off)

Preliminary Statement by H.E. Danny Faure, Former President of the Republic of Seychelles, Chair of the Commonwealth Observer Group, 2 October 2023

Excellencies, members of the media, ladies and gentlemen:

Thank you for coming to this Commonwealth Observer Group press conference, where I will present the interim observations of our Group on the second round of the Presidential Election held on 30 September.

The Commonwealth is honoured to have observed both rounds of the Maldivian Presidential Election. For the first round, I chaired a Group of eleven eminent individuals who observed the election on 9 September 2023, and we issued our Preliminary Statement on 11 September 2023.

For the second round of the Presidential Election, we arrived on 27 September, and we will depart Maldives on 4 October. I have returned this time with six of the original observers, drawn from every region of the Commonwealth. As in the first round, the Group's assessment will be its own and independent from that of the Commonwealth Secretariat.

As I have stated in earlier statements, we are here as friends of the Republic of Maldives. It is my hope that our presence affirms the unwavering support of the Commonwealth family to this country. The Maldives holds the same values that are held dear by all Commonwealth members: peace, democracy, the rule of law, good governance, and sustainable development.

Today, we convey to you our preliminary observations. Our final report on the 2023 Presidential Election will be submitted to the Secretary-General, and later shared with the Government of the Republic of Maldives and other key stakeholders, and then made publicly available.

Ahead of election day, our observers had the opportunity to meet a range of stakeholders. These included civil society organisations, the Elections Commission, the Police, and political leaders and representatives. We were encouraged by the feedback we received that the pre-election environment was largely peaceful and that it afforded the civic and political space to express dissenting opinions.

For this round, members of our Group were deployed to various atolls, where they engaged with local stakeholders: including to the Gaaf Dhaal atoll, Haa Dhaalu, Kaafu and Seenu atolls. For the first time, observers were deployed to an overseas location, in London. I was in Malé and visited Hulhumalé as well as nearby islands.

Election Day

In making our preliminary observations on election day, let me proceed at the outset by commending the people of Maldives for the peaceful and orderly manner in which they exercised their right to vote on 30 September.

Much like our observations from the first-round, this time too, our observers saw citizens across the Maldives exercising their democratic rights with great civility. We also realise this democratic exercise would not have been possible without the high level of diligence and coordination shown by the Elections Commission of Maldives and their staff, as well as by the Maldives Police Service.

Opening of Polls

We note that polling officials meticulously followed all pre-poll procedures, as was the case with the conduct of the first round on 9 September. We observed that the opening of polls took place on time.

Conduct of the Poll

We were impressed by efforts made by the Elections Commission to improve their processes in response to some of our recommendations from our preliminary findings in the first round.

We noted the improvements introduced by the Elections Commission to protect the secrecy of the ballot. These include relocation of some polling stations to more spacious facilities and the modification of voting booths.

Voter verification was yet again well managed during this election. We also observed the changes introduced in relation to applying indelible ink to the voters. The additional ballot boxes at some polling stations significantly improved queue management and led to a smooth process.

Eligible voters came out to cast their votes, demonstrating their determination and commitment to democratic processes in Maldives. We were pleased to note the higher voter participation in this election. We were also encouraged to note the significant presence of women and youth among voters and polling staff at many polling stations.

We found the hourly updates of those who voted by the polling officials to be very useful. We commend these officials for providing gender disaggregated data of those who voted.

Participation and Inclusion

At some polling stations, seats were clearly marked and reserved for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs). Priority was given to pregnant women, PWDs and the elderly.

We note that, as in the first round, overseas (diaspora) voting was organised in five countries; India, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, the United Arab Emirates, and the United Kingdom. Polling in London was conducted according to prescribed procedures, with a high degree of transparency and professionalism.

Party agents and candidate representatives

Observers and monitors of the political parties who were contesting this election were present at most polling stations we visited. They conducted themselves professionally.

Security

The police presence was generally discreet as was the case in the first round, and they conducted themselves with professionalism.

Citizen and International Observers

We engaged with other international and domestic observers during our deployment. Once again, we would like to thank all international and domestic (citizen) observers for their continued cooperation and exchange of views on the unfolding process.

Close and Count

We observed that for this round, the Elections Commission extended the close of polls to 5:00 pm. The close and count followed due process, with a high degree of transparency, for which the polling staff should be commended.

CONCLUSION AND POST-ELECTION PERIOD

Our overall assessment is that the conduct of the second round of the Presidential Election was peaceful and transparent. Credit for this outcome must go, most of all, to the Maldivian people, who once again demonstrated their commitment to the democratic process of their country. We reiterate our earlier appeal to them to maintain the same commitment to peace in the post-election period.

We hope that the recommendations of our final report will be helpful to all stakeholders and contribute to the further strengthening of democratic processes in the Maldives.

On behalf of the Commonwealth Observer Group, I extend my congratulations and best wishes to the people of the Maldives on this Presidential Election and to President-elect Dr. Mohamed Muizzu. We look forward to seeing the orderly and peaceful transition of power, a true testament to the Commonwealth's democratic values.

For more information, or to organise media interviews, please contact:

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Notes to Editors

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