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**REFERENCE GUIDE
FOR ELECTION OBSERVERS**

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CHECKLISTS

- Polling Day Checklist for Observers Centrefold
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PREFACE

I - User's Guide

This Reference Guide is designed primarily to assist those election observers:

- i) who arrive shortly before the polling day(s) and leave soon afterward;
- ii) whose role is to "passively" evaluate the election, to obtain information concerning electoral activities occurring before their arrival, and to take comprehensive notes of all events during their stay in the country;
- iii) who have not been given authority as "active" monitors or supervisors to give advice, guidance or instructions to election officials or political representatives, or the mandate to supervise the administration of the election process;
- iv) whose mandate, individually or collectively, is to arrive at a conclusion about the election, based on factual information obtained; and/or
- v) who report this conclusion publicly to the media, to the responsible organizations of both the host and the sponsoring countries, or who report privately to the sponsoring body.

II - Contents

The Guide is subdivided into six sections:

- A. A BASIC APPROACH TO ELECTION OBSERVATION
- B. PRE-ELECTION DAY REVIEW
- C. ELECTION DAY: OBSERVING VOTING ACTIVITIES
- D. OBSERVING THE COUNTING PROCESS
- E. POST-ELECTION DAY CONSIDERATIONS
- F. THE OBSERVERS' REPORT(S)

A. A BASIC APPROACH TO OBSERVING ELECTIONS

I MANDATE

Observers will normally be given a mandate by their sponsoring body. As a general rule, they are asked to report on their observations of the election process and to reach conclusions as to whether the election process was administered freely and fairly, and whether the outcome was valid.

To be able to do this, the observation must be carried out in terms of the laws and regulations affecting the election and within this framework observers must weigh all aspects of the electoral process such as voter registration, candidate selection and registration, the political campaign, media access, and the voting and counting systems, in addition to what they experience on polling day. It often happens that observers are not in the country for a long enough period prior to the election to have a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the electoral environment or the events leading up to election day. In such instances, it is invaluable for election observers to seek out those groups which can provide them with comprehensive information that will assist them in meeting their mandate.

II SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Observers should attempt to use all available briefing sources from both within their own countries and the country whose election is being observed. As much information as possible should be sought before observers visit the polling stations.

Examples of sources can include:

1. *Foreign affairs departments and diplomatic missions* on the subjects of political and social conditions, medical and security precautions.
2. *Pre-election advisory, observation or fact-finding teams from the same or other organizations* on the current electoral environment, political and electoral activities, and problems which have occurred.
3. *Representatives of the responsible electoral body, nationally and locally* on the Constitution, the Elections Act and Regulations, the electoral organization, election administration and the complaints process.
4. *Political party representatives* on campaigning, including rallies, the media, registration, violence and intimidation.

regulations. Whether or not a written code of conduct exists, all observers should conduct themselves according to the following principles:

Observers should:

1. Obtain official accreditation from the receiving country to permit access to the polls and other election sites;
2. Be impartial and non-partisan;
3. Not interfere in the internal jurisdiction or affairs of the country;
4. Not disrupt or interfere in the election process, or at the polls;
5. Have freedom of access to speak to or meet with all political parties, candidates and election officials, subject to availability;
6. Have freedom of access to all polls and counting centres at all times, unless they are temporarily overcrowded; and
7. Have freedom of movement throughout the country, without prior permission or notification, subject to valid security considerations.
8. Have the freedom to report independently and publicly on their findings, observations and conclusions.

V RECORDING OBSERVATIONS

In order to facilitate the recording of observations throughout the election period, it is useful to carry a pocket notebook for noting the time, date, place and circumstances observed or complaints received, as these arise.

The very act of taking notes conveys an immediate impression of interest and concern. Where a complaint arises, the recording of the information itself often provides assurance to the complainant that the concerns will be conveyed to a higher authority.

Checklists for use both before and on polling day are also helpful reference tools and may be provided by the sponsoring body.

Using notebooks and checklists on the spot will ensure that specific details are easily accessible during the preparation of both the final observation report and of any interim reports, whether planned or required due to special circumstances.

B. PRE-ELECTION DAY REVIEW

In the previous section, reference was made to potential sources of information which observers might consult prior to visiting the polls.

The following paragraphs focus on the range of topics which might be explored or discussed with the various information sources, PRIOR to polling day. These topics include:

1. The Constitution and Election Legislation;
2. Human Rights;
3. The Judiciary;
4. The Military and the Police;
5. The Responsible Election Body or Bodies;
6. Electoral Boundaries and Representation;
7. Parties and Candidates;
8. Political Campaigns;
9. The Media;
10. Civic Education and Voter Information;
11. Voter Registration;
12. Voting Procedures;
13. Counting Procedures; and
14. Recounts and Recourse.

Some typical questions or points for consideration on each topic are raised below as a guide to the kind of information which might be sought in the information-gathering phase. There are undoubtedly other questions which observers will wish to add to the list, depending on their particular areas of expertise and concern, as well as on local conditions.

It is essential that observers fully understand the objective of the electoral event, whether that is an election, plebiscite or referendum at the presidential, national and/or local level(s).

1. The Constitution and Election Legislation

Does this legislation provide for:

- basic democratic rights to vote and be elected;
- freedom of speech and expression;
- freedom of assembly and association;
- universal suffrage; and

Will they be voting at the regular or special polls?

If at the regular polls, will they be voting in uniform?

Are there, or were there, any states of emergency, curfews or other controls in effect?

5. The Responsible Election Body or Bodies

What is the composition of the senior body?

How and by whom were its members appointed?

Is it a neutral, impartial, and/or balanced mechanism, preferably (but not necessarily) independent of government, legislatively, structurally, physically and financially?

Does it deal with all political parties in an even-handed way?

Does it apply the electoral act faithfully to the wording and intent of the legislation?

Are the field organizations throughout the country independent and impartial?

Do these offices have the logistical, personnel and material support necessary to carry out their roles and responsibilities?

6. Electoral Boundaries and Representation

What is the representation system? *Majority* (e.g., single member, multi member); *Proportional* (e.g., full, limited); *Mixed* (e.g., single transferrable vote, single non-transferrable vote, limited voting)

How are the representatives elected or selected (e.g. strict lists, direct voting)?

Are the electoral districts, regions or constituencies defined so as to ensure relatively equal representation of the population?

What were the criteria that were used in establishing the electoral boundaries, and are they recorded in legislation or policy?

Was the establishment of boundaries carried out by a non-partisan independent body?

How was the violence dealt with by the authorities?

Are there any dispute-resolution mechanisms in place?

Were all parties able to communicate with the electors to the extent and in the manner they wished?

9. The Media

Do media services exist that are independent of government control?

Do they present the full range of political views?

Is there any evidence of media control or censorship by the government or any particular party?

Do all parties/candidates have equitable access to the mass media for publicizing their political platforms either in paid or unpaid messages?

Do they have equitable access to state and public service media?

Is the media directly, or through other groups, actively involved in voter education?

Does the media have a code of ethics or code of conduct related to the election?

Is state and public service media coverage reasonably well-balanced and non-partisan?

10. Civic Education and Voter Information

What is the nature and scope of the civic education and voter information program?

What bodies are responsible?

Are the political parties/candidates involved?

Are some programme elements targeted to specific groups such as women, youth, electors with disabilities, aboriginal and ethnic minorities and illiterate electors?

Are the information materials suitable for their target audiences?

Is the electorate adequately informed concerning the democratic process and the

What are the most common registration problems?

How do the political parties/candidates view the registration process? and do they play a role in it?

Have some electors not registered and for what reason?

Will the electoral register be up-to-date on polling day?

Is there a mechanism for registration on polling day?

Is there an effective objection and appeal process?

12. Voting Procedures

What is the step-by-step voting procedure?

How many polling stations will there be?

How many election officials are assigned to each polling station and what are their responsibilities?

How many electors are expected to use each polling station?

How far will electors have to travel?

What provisions are in place to prevent multiple voting?

What is the nature and extent of the training programme for election officials?

How are the poll officials selected?

Who is permitted to be present in the poll during and outside voting hours?

What is the role of the party/candidate agents at the poll?

Are there local national observers?

What are the special provisions, if any, for prison inmates and handicapped, ill, minority language or illiterate voters?

Are there provisions for voting outside the country?

Who requests them - or are they done automatically under certain circumstances?

Who supervises a recount and declares the final result?

Is there any recourse in the event of a challenged election? - Are the courts involved?

PRE-ELECTION ACTIVITIES

Several days to a week before polling day(s), observers should travel to the area(s) they plan to observe in order to locate the polling stations and meet with the responsible local election and civic officials. They should discuss with these officials the preparations that are underway for the election and any problems that are being encountered or are anticipated.

It may also be useful to meet with local representatives of all political parties and with other observers. In this way, not only will observers be familiar with the location and with the individuals responsible prior to polling day, but they may also avoid duplication of effort with other observers and will have established an international presence in the community.

C. *ELECTION DAY: OBSERVING VOTING ACTIVITIES*

Two options are available to observers visiting polling stations. Ideally, activities in only one polling station should be observed for a period starting before the opening of the polls, throughout the day, to after closing time. (The counting process will be discussed in the next section.) However, most international observers, because of their limited numbers, find it preferable to visit a number of polling stations, in order to obtain a wider overview of the polling day activities, to make some unexpected visits (the surprise element), and to establish an international presence in the region or district, rather than in only one location.

1. PRIOR TO THE OPENING OF THE POLLING STATIONS

Observers should arrive at polling stations prior to the time scheduled for the opening of the polls. At this time it should be noted whether:

- all required election officials are present;
- all accredited party/candidate representatives are present;
- other national or international observers are present;
- all election supplies and lists of electors are on hand and functional;
- ballots, ballot boxes and seals have been carefully guarded and secured up to and since their arrival at the poll;
- all forms, protocols and other documents have been signed by those responsible, as required by law;
- the responsible election officials are fully aware of and follow all requirements for setting up and opening the poll;
- ballot boxes are shown to be empty before being sealed in the presence of party/candidate representatives and observers;
- the serial numbers on the ballot boxes, ballot stubs and on the seals used (where applicable) are recorded by those present;
- adequate security for the poll has been provided;
- queues of voters waiting for the polls to open are controlled and orderly; and

accordance with the defined procedures;

- election officials are knowledgeable concerning special provisions (if any) which might apply to blind, disabled, and to illiterate and other electors who may need extra assistance;
- to what extent voting by blind, disabled or illiterate voters is a secret vote and whether this group forms a significant percentage of the population;
- on leaving the voting screen, voters have folded their ballots so as to ensure the secrecy of their choice;
- election officials ensure that all ballots cast are deposited in the correct ballot box;
- electors leave the polls in a quiet and orderly manner;
- political party representatives were able to witness and, if necessary, question or challenge any aspect of the voting process; and
- the administration of the polls was such as to create confidence that all electors would be able to cast their votes within the time allotted.

Observers may find it useful to determine the average time it takes a voter to vote from entry to departure. In addition, depending on what time of day the visit takes place, observers may be able to forecast, by determining the maximum number of electors at any poll compared with the number of votes already cast, the time remaining, the number of people waiting, and the average time to process each elector, whether all electors will be able to vote before the official close of the polls. In some cases, where it appears there may be problems in this respect, observers may wish to revisit certain polls.

3. THE CLOSING OF THE POLL

Observers should attempt to attend the closing of a poll at a location where possible problems might be anticipated, such as a remaining queue of electors. At the close of the polls, observers should determine whether:

- the polls closed at the time provided for by law;
- the closing of the poll was extended due to late opening or other similar circumstances (as provided by law or at the personal discretion of the election official);

D. OBSERVING THE COUNTING PROCESS

The counting of the ballots is often carried out at the polling stations immediately after the close of the polls. However, some countries, often for security reasons, conduct the counting at one central location or at a number of regional counting centres. In these situations, ballot boxes and related materials need to be transported, thereby raising additional concerns which the observer must take into account.

1. Transportation of ballots from the polling station to a counting centre

Where ballots are transported from the polling station to a counting centre, observers should determine whether:

- all the ballot boxes, seals, unused ballots, stubs, etc. being sent have been properly sealed, secured and recorded;
- all the preparations have been observed by party/candidate agents and observers;
- the responsible election officials, military, or police, etc., as provided for by the election authorities, are present and have provided for suitable transportation facilities and adequate security;
- the ballot boxes, related election materials and reports are accompanied in the same vehicle by party/candidate agents and possibly observers;
- the length of time taken to transport the ballot boxes from the poll to the counting centre is unreasonably long;
- there were any incidents or complaints relating to the transport of ballot boxes; and whether
- on arrival, there is any evidence of tampering with or the replacement of any of the balloting materials.

2. Counting at the poll or counting centre

At the poll or counting centre, the observer should determine whether:

- party/candidate agents and observers are present throughout;
- media representatives are permitted;

E. POST-ELECTION DAY CONSIDERATIONS

It is quite common to find that even unofficial election results are not available on election night. In such cases, partial results may not be sufficient to predict the final outcome. In some instances, several days or even weeks are required before the official results are announced. Because the greater the length of time that elapses between the count and the announcement of the results, the greater the level of suspicion and accusations of manipulation and fraud, this period presents a critical challenge to observers.

Observers should therefore attempt to follow closely any and all final vote tallying which may take place in the period leading up to the announcement of the official results.

Once the announcement is made, the observers should:

- determine the level of credibility given to the announcement, and the level of public acceptance;
- determine the percentage of votes cast as related to the total number of electors, to establish whether a majority of the population voted;
- calculate the total number and percentage of spoiled and rejected (invalid) ballots, to establish whether there is any significant impact on the results. If so, an attempt should be made to determine the cause of this occurrence;
- determine the number and percentage of votes and seats obtained by parties/candidates and assess the overall results, in order to establish whether the results indicate a clear, unqualified expression of the wishes of the electorate;
- try to establish whether all participating parties accepted the results, and, in the case of complaints or objections, the seriousness of these; and
- determine how expeditiously investigations and complaints were handled and by what authority.

Given the importance of these factors, it is desirable that at least some observers remain for a reasonable period after polling day, in order to obtain first-hand information to complete their reports.

F. THE OBSERVERS' REPORT(S)

Observers may be asked to make one (or more) of the following types of reports:

1. "Off-the-cuff" reports

An informal, on-the-spot "report" is sometimes requested by the media, an embassy, political or electoral officials or others during the course of the election. In such circumstances, observers are advised to provide very little or no information, rather than comment, perhaps unwisely, on electoral processes which are not yet complete, or risk compromising their impartial status by making premature judgements.

2. Special reports

A special report may be made during the course of the electoral period preceding polling day. There may be one or a series of these reports. They could be status reports on the progress of the various electoral activities or they could focus on specific problems, abuses, or other negative situations which may be expected to have a detrimental impact on the election. These types of reports are sometimes useful as a basis for discussions with election, government or party officials in order to resolve problems when they are identified. Although such reports are often produced by pre-election monitoring or technical assistance teams, it may sometimes be desirable and useful for observers to prepare one or more interim reports.

3. The Observer's Report

During the course of the election, members of observation teams will often visit different polling stations and will record their comments separately. Subsequently these observations will be discussed and amalgamated into an observers' group report. The comments and suggestions which follow, provide some guidelines as to the context and approach to the preparation of this final report of the observer team. (A single observer who is not part of a team should also use the guidelines which follow in preparing his or her final report.)

4. The Observer Team Report

(a) Deciding on contents

This report should identify the participants of the observer group and briefly describe their activities from the time of arrival to the time of departure. The sources of their information, especially with respect to events which occurred

- political parties and NGO's
- freedom of assembly, to hold political rallies and to campaign
- freedom of access to and by the elector, to transmit and receive political and electoral information messages
- freedom to register as an elector, a party or a candidate
- freedom from violence, intimidation and coercion
- freedom of access to the polls by electors, party agents and accredited observers
- freedom to exercise the franchise in secret
- freedom to question, challenge and register complaints or objections without negative repercussions.

"FAIR" = an electoral process where the "playing field" is reasonably level and accessible to all electors, parties and candidates, and includes:

- an independent, non-partisan electoral organization to administer the process
- guaranteed rights and protection through the constitution and electoral legislation and regulations
- equitable representation of electors provided through the legislation
- clearly defined universal suffrage and secrecy of the vote
- equitable criteria and opportunities to register as an elector, a political party or a candidate
- equitable and balanced reporting by the media
- equitable access to financial and material resources for party and candidate campaigning
- equitable opportunities for the electorate to receive political and voter information
- accessible polling places
- equitable treatment of electors, candidates and parties by election officials, the government, the police, the military and the judiciary
- an open and transparent ballot counting process
- an election process which is not disrupted by violence, intimidation or coercion.

(d) Final evaluation

In the case of observer groups, following a review of individual reports, the final evaluation should normally be reached through consensus of all members.

If we accept the statement that "Every state should be possessed of a government whose authority derives from the will of the people as expressed by a secret ballot in genuine free and fair elections held at regular intervals on the basis of

POLLING DAY CHECKLIST FOR OBSERVERS

The summary "yes", "no", numerical or other summary entries on this checklist should be supplemented on each day of voting by a narrative description (by poll and item numbers) of your observations.

NO.	SUBJECT OF OBSERVATION	POLL #	POLL #	POLL #	POLL #
1	What was the time of observers' arrival?				
2	What was the time of observers' departure?				
THE POLLING PLACE					
3	Was the poll suitable (location, access, security, flow, crowd control, space)?				
4	If this was a multiple polling site, how many polls did it contain?				
5	Were there complaints about the poll location?				
6	Were all required polling officials present?				
7	Were party or candidates' agents present?				
8	Was there any evidence of problems or conflict among party agents?				
9	Were observers (national, international) present?				
10	Was there a presence (in or outside poll) of military or police?				
11	Were armed security forces inside the polls?				
12	Was a supervising official readily available to resolve problems?				
13	Did polling officials have a good understanding of their responsibilities?				
14	What was time of opening of poll - (on time, late)?				
15	Were ballot boxes displayed as empty before being sealed at the opening of the poll?				
16	Were ballot boxes sealed securely with numbered seals?				

NO.	SUBJECT OF OBSERVATION	POLL #	POLL #	POLL #	POLL #
38	Did the voting compartment location provide for secrecy?				
39	Did electors have difficulty in voting?				
40	Were most electors familiar with the voting process?				
41	Did numerous electors take long periods of time to mark their ballots (indicating problems with comprehension)?				
42	Were ballots folded to ensure secrecy after voting?				
43	What was the average waiting time to vote?				
44	How long from entry to exit did it take to vote?				
45	Were electors voting of their own free will?				
46	Did electors believe their vote was secret?				
47	Did electors in line give up and leave before voting? (number?)				
48	Was transportation available for electors?				
49	What was the maximum number of electors that was planned for at this poll?				
50	What was the number of electors who voted?				
CLOSING OF THE POLL					
51	What was the time of poll closing - (on time, late)?				
52	How many people were waiting to vote at closing?				
53	Was voting continued after closing?				
54	Was there evidence of conflict or violence?				
55	Were there complaints about the voting process?				
56	When the polls closed were the required reports completed?				
THE COUNT					
57	Was counting carried out at the poll?				

OBSERVERS TRAVEL CHECKLIST OF MATERIALS AND SUPPLIES

Note: Many of these items may not be required depending on the nature, length, and location of the assignment. Conversely, other items, not on this list, may be necessary or desirable. In any event, take only the minimum number of each required item, and wherever possible, take wash-and-wear clothing. Avoid taking expensive watches or jewelry.

Required for this trip (*)	ITEM	Quantity or Amount	Packed (✓)
	A adapter -- converter and plugs -- 230V to 115V		
	Airline tickets		
	Alarm clock		
	B athing suit		
	Belly-bag		
	Belt		
	Binoculars		
	Blouses - shirts - T shirts		
	Books -- magazines		
	Bottle opener -- corkscrew		
	Bottled water or water-purifying tablets		
	Briefing material		
	C alculator -- extra batteries		
	Camera and film		
	Candles		
	Citizenship document		
	Coat - raincoat, wind breaker		
	Computer		
	Credit Cards		
	Currency (cash)		
	D ictating machine and tapes		
	Diskettes		

OBSERVERS TRAVEL CHECKLIST OF MATERIALS AND SUPPLIES

	Plastic bags for laundry, etc.		
	Pocket knife		
	Purse		
	R adio -- short-wave -- extra batteries		
	Razor -- shaver		
	S carf		
	Shoes -- dress, running shoes, sandals, hiking boots		
	Socks -- stockings -- pantyhose		
	Sun tan lotion (#15 plus)		
	Sunglasses		
	Sweater		
	T ape -- masking, packaging, sticky tape		
	Ties		
	Toiletries: soap, shampoo, makeup, talcum powder, brush, comb, toothbrush, toothpaste, sanitary napkins, etc.		
	Towel -- Washcloth		
	Travellers cheques (including small denominations)		
	U mbrella		
	Underwear		
	V accination book		
	Visa		
	W alkman and audio cassettes		