



IGAD ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION TO THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN DJIBOUTI

PRELIMINARY REPORT

11th April 2021, Republic of Djibouti

I. INTRODUCTION:

This is a Preliminary Report of the IGAD short-term Election Observation Mission (EOM) for the Presidential Election held in the Republic of Djibouti on 9 April 2021. The Mission was deployed following an invitation by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Djibouti.

The report covers findings from the date of arrival of the Observer Mission on 5th April 2021 to the poll closing and vote counting processes on 9th April, 2021.

IGAD is a Regional Economic Community (REC) with eight member states; Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda, with a mandate to promote peace, prosperity and regional integration in the region. IGAD established a Political Affairs Programme in 2008 to assist Member States' efforts to achieve democracy, good governance, credible elections and respect for human rights. The programme recognizes the promotion of democracy, good governance and the conduct of free and fair elections as necessary to the enhancement of peace, stability and security in the region.

The Observation Mission is a 16-person team led by Hon. Siraj Fegessa who is a former Minister of Defense of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, and currently the Director of IGAD Peace and Security Division.

II. OBJECTIVES:

The overall objective of the IGAD short-term Mission was to observe the conduct of the Presidential election in the Republic of Djibouti and offer an informed and independent assessment for the advancement of the country's ongoing democratization process, particularly efforts to conduct free, fair and credible elections.

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The Mission's specific objectives were to:

- a) Assess the conditions for the conduct of free, fair and credible elections that would allow the people of Djibouti to freely express their political will;
- b) Assess and determine whether the elections were conducted in accordance with the Constitution, relevant legal and institutional frameworks of Djibouti as well as international benchmarks set out in the African Union Declaration of the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa, the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance and the Declaration of Principles for International Observers adopted by the United Nations in October 2005; and
- c) Identify strengths, challenges, lessons and recommendations for improvement of future election processes.

III. ASSESSMENT TOOLS:

Assessment tools consisting of checklists on the poll opening, polling, vote counting, tallying and announcement of results developed by the IGAD Secretariat were used. These tools are in conformity with international observation standards.

IV. METHOD OF WORK:

The IGAD EOM interacted with key national and international stakeholders to gather adequate information on key aspects of the electoral process, and visited (Arta, Ali Sabieh, Tadjourah, Djibouti City districts and 122 polling stations), the results of which informed the preparation of this report.

V. PRE-ELECTION ACTIVITIES:

The Head of IGAD EOM joined other heads of International Election Observation Missions (EOMs) including the African Union Commission (AUC), the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) and the Arab League (AL) to engage with relevant national stakeholders.

Officials met included: H.E. Mohammed Hassan, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Hon. Moumin Cheick, Minister of Interior; Hon. Mohamed Ali Houmed, President of the national Assembly of Djibouti and Mr. Farah Abdillahi Walieh the Chairperson of the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) of the Republic of Djibouti.

Additionally, meetings were held with the Union for the Presidential Majority (UMP) Presidential candidate, H.E. Mr. Ismael Omar Guelleh and the Independent presidential candidate, Mr. Zakaria Ismael Farah.

VI. PRELIMINARY FINDINGS:

a) Context

Two candidates contested in the 9 April presidential election; the incumbent H.E. Ismael Omar Guelleh of the UMP and Mr. Zakaria Ismael Farah, an independent candidate. According to the Constitution of Djibouti, the President of the Republic is elected for a six-year term by direct universal suffrage and a winner is determined through absolute majority.

b) Constitutional and Legal Framework

The main legal instruments governing the conduct of elections in Djibouti include the following among others:

- The Constitution of the Republic of Djibouti of 15 December 1992,
- The Constitutional law N° 92/AN/10/6th/L of 21 April 2010 on the amendment of the constitution,
- Organic law N°. 1/AN/92 of 29 October 1992 on elections and its amendments,
- Decree N°. 2020-320 / PR / MI on the organization of the presidential election of April 9, 2021.
- Decree N°. 2010-0241/PR/MID on the composition and functioning of the National Independent Electoral Commission,
- Order N° 2020-182/PR/MI on the appointment of members of CENI.

c) Election Management

The National Independent Electoral Commission of Djibouti (CENI) was established by Decree No.2010-0241/PR/MI dated December 18th, 2010 on the composition and functioning of the National Electoral Commission (CENI). CENI is a temporary body instituted before elections and dissolved after the process is complete.

While the Constitutional Council has a general oversight role on the conduct of electoral processes in Djibouti, election management is handled by the Ministry of Interior. Decree No. 2010-0241/PR/MI mandates, the National Independent Electoral Commission to ensure and determine the regularity of all requisite processes for free, fair, transparent and credible elections.

d) Voter Registration and Voter's Roll

The Total number of registered voters for the 9 April Presidential election was 215,663.

However, the IGAD EOM was short-term and therefore did not have the opportunity to observe the Voter Registration process.

e) Campaign Process

The IGAD Election Observer Mission did not observe the Campaign Process.

f) Preparedness of the Electoral Management Body

The Observer Mission noted that CENI officials and polling officials generally demonstrated a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

g) Preparation of Polling Stations

On 8th April 2021, IGAD Election Observers conducted pre-election day assessment and physical identification of the polling stations in preparation for the election day. The Mission noted that the preparation of the polling stations was completed ahead of the voting day.

VII. ELECTION DAY/POLLING OBSERVATIONS

The Election Observer Mission visited 122 polling stations in Arta, Ali Sabieh, Tadjourah and Djibouti City districts and observed the following:

a) Polling Centers:

- Most polling stations opened on the scheduled time (6:00 am). A few of the centers however opened at 6:30am.
- The IGAD EOM generally had free access to the polling stations.
- The polling centers and polling stations were laid out in a manner that allowed easy flow of voters.
- Some observers registered concerns about accessibility of some polling stations to persons with disability.

b) Election Materials:

- Election materials were distributed on time and in sufficient quantity.

c) Election Officials:

- Most of the Electoral officials generally demonstrated a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities in the areas observed. However, few were still lacking the required knowledge on the process and counting procedures.
- The Mission also noted that Election Officials were generally cooperative, courteous and patient in conducting their mandates.

d) Independent Observers and Candidates' Agents:

- The observers encountered AUC observers in some of the polling stations visited. There were no domestic observers.

e) The Voting Process:

- Every voter had the same number of votes (one person one vote) and all votes carried the same weight.
- Voters' cards were stamped and a finger dipped in indelible ink for every person that had completed casting their ballot. This ensured that no one voted more than once.

f) Voters turnout

- Voter turnout progressively increased throughout the day.

g) Closing and Counting Process:

- The Mission observed the poll counting process was conducted in a peaceful and orderly manner.

h) Participation of women:

- The Mission observed that women turned out in large numbers to vote. Observers also noted that women participated as polling officials and agents in numerous polling stations visited.

i) Participation of the youth

- Observers noted that youth served as polling officials in many of the polling stations visited.

j) Security

- The Observer Mission noted that the security environment during the election was peaceful with no incidents recorded.
- Police officers and Gendarmes were present near polling stations in large numbers.

k) COVID19 Protocols

- In most of the polling stations visited, there were either hand-washing facilities or sanitizers. However, observers noted that in some polling stations wearing of masks and social distancing protocols were not strictly adhered to.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **To CENI :**
 - **Further strengthen voter education and training of election officials** on election processes and their respective roles as well as the role of other stakeholders such as election observers.
 - **Improve the secrecy of the ballot** by instituting systems such as providing a proper disposal mechanism for unused ballots within the polling station as well as ensuring that ballot envelopes can be sealed.
- **To the Government:**
 - **Encourage the participation civil society** in the process including as domestic observers.

IX. CONCLUSION:

Based on what the Mission has observed on the 9th of April 2021, the IGAD Observer Mission is of the view that the 2021 Presidential election was conducted in a peaceful and orderly manner.

IGAD affirms its commitment to continue to support the government and people of Djibouti in the promotion of democracy, good governance, credible elections and respect for human rights.

The IGAD Election Observation Mission wishes to take this opportunity to thank the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Djibouti, the Ministry of Interior, the Constitutional Council and

the people of the Republic of Djibouti as well as the media for the assistance rendered to make its mission successful.

Finally, the Mission would also like to congratulate the people of the Republic of Djibouti on the successful conduct of the 2021 Presidential Election. ###