

London/Hargeisa, 1 November 2021

Independent international team observing Somaliland's May 31 2021 parliamentary and local council elections launches final report

The elections marked an important moment for democracy in Somaliland: after significant delays to both polls, they marked the first time that national and local elections have been held together

Says Professor Michael Walls of DPU, Chief Observer on the mission:

“While these elections represent democratic progress, they were held 11 years after the originally envisaged expiration of the parliamentary term, and more than three years after council elections were due. It is good news that they were peaceful and accepted as credible by stakeholders. However, uniquely in Africa, not a single woman was elected to Parliament. This is a serious democratic deficit, even marking a step backwards from past, already low, levels of female representation. While it is cause for celebration that Somaliland has continued to hold elections, it is also time to focus on seeking ways to strengthen the procedures in place for the next poll, due in 2022 and those that take place after that.”

The elections, which occurred under the challenging circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic, and under Somaliland's consolidated General Law for National Elections and Voters' Registration, represented progress along Somaliland's democratic path. There were many positives, notably the election of a member of a 'minority' clan to parliament, the improved electoral law (albeit still with too much left to the discretion of electoral and political authorities), and the fact that media coverage was generally regarded as balanced and responsible. Importantly, election day itself and its aftermath passed off peacefully, with Somalilanders once again turning out enthusiastically to vote.

However, there are also aspects of the electoral process that require improvement to reach international standards. The voter registration process in particular is complicated and restrictive for voters and potential voters and, in the absence of a census, cannot describe with precision what proportion of the possible electorate is registered to vote.

Furthermore, the mission calls for three profound changes: reform of the restrictive political system in which only three political parties are permitted to contest elections, which severely curtails democratic representation; Somalilander-led legislative measures to ensure female political representation; and political re-commitment to the agreed constitutional electoral timetable so that future elections are held on time, banishing the long tradition of electoral delay in Somaliland to the past.

The mission's final report also makes a number of additional recommendations, including enhancing voter education and the secrecy of voting, better training for polling station staff, and an improved system for counting and tabulation of votes.

Notes

The LIEOM launches the report with a public event at UCL on 1 November 2021. The event will be livestreamed at facebook.com/LIEOMSomaliland2021.

The limited international election observation mission was invited by Somaliland's National Electoral Commission (NEC) as independent international observers to observe the electoral process. The mission is funded by the UK government, but is independent from it and international in composition. The LIEOM was organised by the Development Planning Unit (DPU) at University College London (UCL). The LIEOM operated in the spirit of the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation affirmed at the UN in 2005 and emphasising the impartiality of the observation.

The independent team of 12 international observers from Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Germany, New Zealand, South Africa, UK, US and Zambia observed the campaign and electoral preparations in the week leading up to the election, election day, and voting, counting and tabulation of results in locations across Somaliland including Hargeisa, Berbera, Burao and Borama.

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