

# Commonwealth Observer Group's Interim Statement on the 2014 Tripartite Elections in Malawi

22 May 2014

**Statement by:** Commonwealth Observer Group to the 2014 Tripartite Elections in Malawi

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## Blantyre, Malawi:

The Commonwealth Observer Group has been present in Malawi since 14 May 2014. During this period, we have met with the Malawi Electoral Commission, representatives of political parties, civil society, the media, the police, as well as other international and national observers. Commonwealth observers deployed to all regions and observed the voting, counting and results aggregation process on Election Day. This is the Interim Statement of the Group, as it is issued with the process yet to be completed. The critical vote tabulation and results processes are still ongoing. We will issue a final report containing our conclusions on the entire process, at a later stage.

## Key Findings

Our initial assessment is that for the most part, voting was conducted in a peaceful, orderly and transparent manner; and our observers reported positively on the voting and counting processes in the majority of polling centres visited. The polling environment was generally conducive to the free expression of will by the electorate.

The Group was impressed by the enthusiasm, patience and determination demonstrated by the people of Malawi to exercise their franchise, even where polling was substantially delayed.

The Commonwealth Observer Group would like to commend the staff of the Malawi Electoral Commission, polling officials, security forces and local administrators for the diligence, dedication and commitment they displayed during these elections.

The key challenge to the poll observed by the Group was serious shortcomings in the preparation and distribution of polling materials. A considerable number of polling stations opened late on account of these shortcomings. There were also numerous cases of vital polling materials being received in insufficient quantities or not at all. These included voters' registers, ballot papers, ballot boxes and lids, seals, relevant forms, lamps and ink. The delay in releasing and dispatching the voters' roll was of particular concern. The Malawi Electoral Commission will need to review its

processes for the preparation and distribution of polling materials to ensure that such delays, which fuel increased anxiety and frustrations, do not occur in future elections.

We regret to note that the generally peaceful polling environment was marred by isolated incidents of violence, perhaps resulting, for the most part, from frustrations with polling delays, which resulted in the disruption and/or abandonment of voting in some areas, particularly in the Blantyre area.

We warmly welcomed statements by political and other leaders appealing for calm on polling day as reports of isolated violence spread. We believe that such statements went a long way in reducing tensions, and contributed to an improved polling environment.

The Group was impressed by the proactive manner in which the Malawi Electoral Commission kept all stakeholders, the public and the media regularly informed and updated on key developments and challenges on polling day. The Chairperson of the Malawi Electoral Commission deserves particular commendation for being forthright and transparent in publicly acknowledging and explaining where and when logistical and other challenges had led to a delay of opening of polls, and for promptly offering practical solutions intended to ensure that every registered voter was enabled to cast his or her vote.

The Group noted with satisfaction that the general atmosphere during the campaign period was peaceful, and that the fundamental rights of candidates and political parties to assemble and campaign was broadly observed. The elections were very competitive, and freedoms of association, expression and participation were generally provided for.

We are however concerned that the public broadcaster, the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), did not adequately demonstrate balanced coverage for political parties as required by the law, though some improvement was reported in comparison to previous elections. Several stakeholders reported a disproportionate coverage of the ruling People's Party and official activities of its presidential candidate. We urge the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation to ensure balance and adhere to the requirements of the provisions of Section 47 (1) b) of the Electoral Laws of Malawi to "maintain neutrality in the manner of reporting the news of the campaign propaganda of candidates and generally in their commentaries".

The Commonwealth Observer Group will today re-assemble in Blantyre to consider its Final Report, where we will elaborate further on the legal and electoral framework and election administration, the election campaign and political participation, voting, counting and result tabulation procedures. This Report will in due course be shared with relevant stakeholders and made public.

We wish to use this opportunity to encourage all stakeholders to continue observing the commendable fraternity and civility that have generally characterised the 2014 tripartite electoral process so far.

[Political Division Democracy Africa Malawi](#)

- See more at: <http://thecommonwealth.org/media/news/commonwealth-observer-groups-interim-statement-2014-tripartite-elections-malawi#sthash.ms61nGmH.dpuf>