



PRESS STATEMENT

‘AU commends the people of Malawi for a transparent electoral process and calls for stakeholders to exercise restraint as they await the Final Results’

1. At the invitation of the Government of the Republic of Malawi and the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC), the African Union Commission deployed an African Union Election Observation Mission (AUEOM) to the 20 May 2014, Tripartite elections in Malawi.
2. The AUEOM comprised of 50 Observers, including 10 Long Term Observers (LTOs) and 40 Short Term Observers (STOs). The observers are drawn from the Pan-African Parliament, African Ambassadors to the African Union (AU), Election Management Bodies (EMBs), and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).
3. On Election Day, the AUEOM observers were able to reach 262 polling stations to observe the opening, voting and counting processes. This statement is the preliminary assessment of the AUEOM. Final detailed report of the AUEOM will be submitted in due course.
4. The AUEOM notes from its observations that voters turned out in impressive numbers even before the stipulated opening time. The environment was largely peaceful and the election was conducted in compliance with procedures stipulated in the legal framework. The voting procedures were simple and easily understood by voters.
5. However, the AUEOM notes that MEC was faced with operational challenges which included late delivery of voting materials in many places as well as poor weather conditions in others. This resulted in delays, with some polling centres opening as late as 1400 hours. For these reasons, the MEC had to extend voting hours and reschedule polling in some of the affected centres.
6. Further to the unavailability of some materials such as ballot papers and indelible ink, the AUEOM also noted that there were challenges regarding the delivery of adequate quantity of election materials to some centres. Examples include Monkey-

bay School, Nikisi School and St. Augustine III Polling centres in Mangochi were the voting process was interrupted at due to shortage in supply of ballot papers.

7. Similarly, in Machinga Constituency, there was a shortage of ballot boxes while in Zomba District, the non-availability of the voter register at Domasi Government School polling station in Zomba constituency resulted in the delay of voting;
8. As a result of the above logistical and administrative challenges, polling was postponed in 45 centres (36 centres in Blantyre, 6 centres in Dedza and 3 centres in Lilongwe in Central region). In some of these centers, voters protested the long wait and destroyed materials.
9. Further to the challenges noted above, the AUEOM noted that the number of security personnel was inadequate for effective crowd control. This limited security coverage necessitated the deployment of the military to intervene in areas where violence occurred such as some areas in Blantyre.
10. Most AU observers noted that at the close of polls, counting took place in poorly lit facilities with minimal security coverage of the process.
11. The AUEOM wishes to note that while there were such concerns hinging on logistical challenges, there were also some positive aspects about the elections that are worth acknowledging:
 - a) We note that while MEC was faced with logistical challenges to transport materials in time to the polling centres, the Commission was able to address most of these challenges in time to allow voting to start. It is also commendable that, in keeping with the electoral law, voting was allowed to continue in the evening in order to compensate for the time lost due to late opening of the polls;
 - b) The AUEOM teams observed with satisfaction the efforts of election personnel to manage the operational challenges experienced on Election Day. The AUEOM further commends election officials for consistently applying stipulated procedures throughout the voting process;
 - c) AUEOM noted the presence of independent citizen observers at most of the polling stations visited. Party and candidate agents were also present and they were able to conduct their duties without inhibition or interference;

- d) The polling centres were located in public facilities which were easily accessible to all voters including the aged and persons with disability;
- e) The mission also noted that 43% of election personnel in the polling stations visited were women;
- f) Most of the stations visited by AU observers were laid out in a manner that allowed easy flow of voters and guaranteed the secrecy of the ballot; and
- g) The visible presence of security personnel was noted by AU teams in all the stations visited.

12. In view of the foregoing, the AUEOM wishes to offer the following recommendations to guide further improvement towards effective delivery and management of future elections:

a) *The Government of Malawi should:*

- i. Support the MEC in delivering its mandate by ensuring adequate and timely approval and disbursement of funds for elections.

b) *The MEC should:*

- i. Undertake a continuous review of the register to contribute to the credibility of the voters register for the next elections;
- ii. The AU mission further recommends that the verification of the register should be done in a timely manner ahead of Election Day and copies of the finalised register availed to political parties in ample time;
- iii. Sensitise election personnel on the need to comply with the guidelines giving priority to expectant mothers and voters with infants in the voting process;
- iv. Intensify its voter education initiatives and collaborate with relevant government agencies and civil society groups; and
- v. Strengthen the capacity building programmes for its staff.

c) The Parliament should:

- i. Develop a plan of action for the implementation of the National Gender Policy and the Gender Equality Bill to create an enabling environment for the participation and representation of women;
- ii. Amend the legal framework to provide a timeframe within which election disputes should be resolved; and
- iii. Amend the legal framework to provide clear guidelines on party and campaign finance regulation.

d) The Security Agencies should:

- i. Ensure adequate security of the elections, by developing a coordinating mechanism that will enable the MEC and security agencies to harmonise their planning and deployment efforts.

13. While the tabulation of election results is ongoing, the AUEOM hereby concludes that the 2014 elections provided an opportunity for Malawians to choose their leaders at the polls. The elections were conducted in a largely transparent manner in accordance with the legal framework of Malawi and international standards.

14. The AUEOM also calls on electoral stakeholders to continue in the peaceful and orderly manner that characterised the pre-election context. We urge parties and candidates to seek redress for disputes that may arise from these elections through the legal systems.

Blantyre, 22 May 2014