



Electoral Observation Mission Belize General Elections November 4, 2015

The Electoral Observation Mission of the Organization of American States (EOM/OAS) deployed to the general elections in Belize congratulates the people of the country on the high degree of civic spirit shown in a peaceful and successful election day.

The Mission fielded 13 observers from 11 countries who observed electoral processes in all 6 administrative regions of the country during the November 4 elections. Observers visited a total of 162 of the country's 225 polling booths in 30 of the 31 constituencies on election day, or 72%. The following preliminary observations are based on the direct observations of the OAS team, as well as on meetings with electoral authorities, a cross-section of government officials, political parties, media, civil society organizations, and religious bodies, among others.

Observations:

Pre-electoral period

The OAS/EOM notes the significant preparations made by Belize's Electoral Authorities ahead of the election to develop procedures and systems that generated a generally inclusive and clean electoral process. The Mission further notes that this was the fourth electoral process held in Belize in 2015.

The OAS Mission was pleased to note the continued high levels of participation by women in most areas of the political process. However, despite an increase in the number of female candidates, there remained, a significantly low ratio of female to male candidates contesting the election – 11 women in a pool of 88 candidates or 12.5%. In a similar vein, the Mission commended the involvement of youth in the campaign, but noted that this trend evidenced itself in large measure in the use of social media, and did not translate into significant levels of participation in the electoral competition.

The Mission heard concerns regarding various elements of the voting process, including the size and integrity of the Voters List, and allegations regarding the high number of transfers, which, appeared to some to leave insufficient time for adequate substantiation. Concern was also expressed regarding the composition of the Proxy Registry and the timeframe for political parties to access the final version of the registry prior to the election.

The report of the 2012 EOM emphasized the need for the Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC) to update the country's electoral boundaries in order to effect greater equity across electoral divisions. The 2015 EOM noted that the issue persists.

The Mission also notes that there are no guarantees to political parties of equitable access to media outlets.

Several stakeholders mentioned the lack of campaign financing legislation in Belize, a recommendation emanating from the 2012 EOM report, and referenced the potential impact of campaign financing on the transparency of the electoral process. The Mission also noted a perception of limited differentiation between the state and the governing party in terms of the use of resources during the campaign.

Election day procedures

On election day, the OAS observers noted that the polls opened on time in all the observed locations, all essential materials had arrived, and that the poll workers ensured the smooth flow of the process. In addition, electors, security forces and party agents were present and engaged in all observed locations,.

Members of the OAS/EOM also observed the persistence of an issue raised in the report of the 2012 EOM relative to campaigning taking place well within the established 100 yard limit from polling centers.

The Mission observed that the polls closed on time, and that all requisite procedures were adhered to. OAS observers witnessed the counting of ballots at tabulation centers observed earlier in the day.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

The Mission welcomed the introduction of simultaneous counting of ballots, which led to more timely results.

The OAS Electoral Observation Mission offers the following preliminary recommendations with a view towards improving the efficiency of the electoral system in Belize, and based on observations and information gathered both in the pre-electoral period and on election day.

1) That efforts be made by all political parties and the government to continue to promote the participation of women in electoral competition and to create avenues to encourage the participation of youth at all levels of the political process, providing training programs and mentorship for women and young political leaders.

2) That a comprehensive re-registration of voters be undertaken in accordance with the Representation of the Peoples Act as recommended by the OAS/EOM in 2012 and that there be established by the competent authorities a clear and feasible limit for electors to register as proxy voters in order to allow the EBD to have a finalized Proxy Register within a reasonable time prior to the day of election.

3) The Mission reiterates the recommendation of the 2012 EOM Report with respect to the need for adjustments to the electoral boundaries, and for differentiation in the responsibilities of the EBC and EBD.

4) That legislation governing campaign financing be enacted as recommended in the 2012 EOM report, and that the dormant Integrity Commission be revived or another similar mechanism established to oversee and supervise financial inflows during the campaigns.

A verbal report on the observations and recommendations of the OAS EOM will be presented by the Chief of Mission to the OAS Permanent Council in Washington D.C. within the next three months. This report, which will include additional observations and recommendations to those outlined here today, will be shared with the Government of Belize, with all stakeholders, and with the general public of Belize through the OAS website at www.oas.org.

The OAS mission wishes to express its thanks to the Government of Belize for the invitation to observe the process and to the Electoral and Boundaries Commission and the Electoral and Boundaries Department, for their cooperation during the mission's stay in the country. In addition, the mission thanks the governments of Argentina, France, South Korea and the United States for their contributions which made this electoral observation mission possible.