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END OF POLLS STATEMENT ON THE ASSIN NORTH CONSTITUENCY BY-ELECTION

CONTACT

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Introduction

The Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) trained and deployed 15 observers who were classified in two categories to observe polling day proceedings in the Assin North Constituency by-election which was held today on Tuesday, June 27, 2023. Among the observers were stationary observers who were stationed at sampled polling stations and observed proceedings from the start of polls to the end of closing, counting and declaration of results at assigned polling stations. At the same time, there were some roaming observers who roamed or visited several polling stations throughout the day in the constituency. As part of their role, the observers impartially observed the process using CODEO's observation checklist and incident forms. This statement highlights observation on the set-up, voting, incidents recorded during voting, closing and counting in polling stations.

Arrival and Set-up for Polls

- CODEO observers reported that election officials were present in the vast majority of the polling stations observers arrived before 6:30AM.
- Majority of the polling stations observed were opened by 7:30AM with very few opening by 8:00 AM. It should be noted that no polling station was observed to have opened after 8:00 AM.
- All the observers indicated they were permitted by polling officials to observe the voting when the polling station was officially opened.
- Adequate polling officials were present in all the polling stations observed. An average of four polling officials were present in all the polling stations observed.
- All the observers indicated that voting booths had been set-up in a manner that allowed eligible voters to mark their ballots in secret.
- Majority of observed polling stations were accessible to the elderly and to Persons with Disabilities (PWDs).
- Agents for all three political parties National Democratic Congress (NDC), the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the Liberal Party of Ghana (LPG) were present in most polling stations even before voting commenced.
- All polling stations observed had two functioning biometric verification devices.
- All voting materials (ballot box, ballot papers, indelible ink, voting screen, validating stamp, ink pad) were observed to be present and in adequate quantity. Tactile ballot papers were observed to be present in the applicable polling stations where persons with visual impairment were expected to vote.

- Most of the ballot booklets were observed to be serialized and ordered numerically.
- All observers indicated that ballot boxes were shown to be empty, sealed, and placed in public view before voting commenced.
- Uniformed police personnel were stationed in all polling stations that were observed.

Voting

- For all polling stations observed, ballot papers were stamped with the validating stamp before being issued to voters.
- Observers reported that no unauthorized person(s) were permitted to remain in the polling station during voting.
- No attempted harassment or intimidation of voters or polling officials were observed in polling stations that were covered.
- All observers indicated that the vulnerable (elderly, pregnant women, nursing mothers, and Persons with Disabilities) were given priority in the queue to vote ahead of others.
- In all polling stations observed, nobody was permitted to vote without going through either biometric or manual verification. However, very few people were permitted to go through the manual verification process before being allowed to vote.
- Biometric verification devices functioned very well in most polling stations. However, at the Cocoa Shed Caanan polling station, the biometric verification device failed to function properly for about three minutes. The polling officials quickly resolved the situation by replacing the faulty device with the backup device, and as such the voting process was not halted.
- Overall, a majority of the observers indicated that minor or no problems occurred during the voting process.

Closing and Counting

- In all polling stations observed, no voter was seen in the queue at 5:00 PM and no one arrived at the polling station after 5:00 pm to vote when polls closed.
- No harassment or intimidation of polling officials, agents, or observers was noted during the counting of votes in polling stations that were covered by the observers.
- No unauthorized persons were present at the inner perimeter/cordoned area during the counting process in observed polling stations.
- At the time of counting, observers reported that there was sufficient light available in all observed polling stations.
- All political party agents were permitted to observe the counting processes.
- There was no instance in which more ballot papers were found in the ballot box other than that of voters who cast ballots.
- After counting was completed, no political party agent requested for a recount of the ballot papers in polling stations that had CODEO observers.
- Political party agents from the NPP and NDC signed the declaration of results form for this parliamentary by-election in observed polling stations. Similarly, Presiding Officers in all observed polling stations signed the declaration of results forms. On the contrary, no LPG party agent was noted to have signed the declaration of results form.

Reported incidents

CODEO Observers reported a few incidents that occurred during the course of the polls and these include issues that were verified:

1. *Intimidation:* At precisely 7:20AM, at Methodist Primary School 2 in Breku, a journalist from Adom TV was interviewing electorates who were in a queue to vote, and he was confronted by a purported executive of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) for conducting an interview at the polling station. Police personnel located at the polling station swiftly intervened and that prevented the situation from degenerating.
2. *Violation of voting procedure:* At the Methodist Primary School 2 in Breku, two electorates were apprehended for taking a snapshot of the ballot paper after voting. When questioned about their actions, they claimed that an unidentified individual had tasked them to take a picture of the marked ballot as proof in return for a monetary reward. They were nearly arrested by security personnel, however, the matter was resolved amicably and the alleged offenders were let go.
3. *Violent Clash:* Around 1:00PM, a convoy of vehicles with NPP occupants, accompanied by the Ashanti Regional Chairman of the NPP, Antwi Bosiako (Chairman Wontumi), pursued a vehicle occupied by NDC supporters from a different polling station to D/C Primary School in Praso (located within the Electoral Area with Polling Station Code B170801). During this pursuit, the occupants of the NPP vehicles proceeded to vandalize and damage parts of the NDC vehicle, resulting in commotion and disturbance along the roadside. Security personnel intervened to calm the situation by removing the actors from the vicinity of the polling station to a distant location. However, it was reported that the individuals involved in the altercation fired gunshots and one person was injured and was taken to the hospital for treatment.

Conclusion

CODEO would like to commend the Electoral Commission, the Ghana Police Service and the electorates for ensuring a largely peaceful by-election which was fully concluded after the winning candidate was declared. CODEO acknowledges that the conduct of the polls was consistent with the general rules and regulations which was adhered to by the polling officials. In addition, there were no shortage of materials and the biometric verification devices functioned well to very a large extent without any significant disruptions to the polls in any of the observed polling stations. CODEO condemns the violent incident which occurred in the constituency and nearly blotted the elections. On this note, the Coalition calls on the Ghana Police Service to urgently investigate the incident and prosecute all persons found culpable to serve as a deterrent.

About CODEO

CODEO is an independent and non-partisan network of civil society groups, faith-based organizations and professional bodies which observe Ghanaian elections. It was established in the year 2000, under the auspices of the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) to mobilize Ghanaian citizens to actively participate in the electoral process and to complement the efforts of Ghana's Electoral Commission in ensuring transparent, free, fair and peaceful elections. The Coalition of 42-member organizations has grown to become the largest and most credible domestic election observer body in Ghana which mobilizes citizens and groups to participate in Ghana's electoral processes.

SIGNED:

Albert Kofi Arhin

National Coordinator, CODEO

(For and on Behalf of the Advisory Board)

Date: Wednesday, June 28, 2023