

Ethiopia Concluding progressive, Commendable Election

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Ethiopia has concluded its fifth national election peacefully and successfully. The incumbent government has taken strenuous measures to further improve the political space in the country.

Elections in Ethiopia are governed by the 1994 Constitution, the Amended Electoral Law (532/2007), the Electoral Code of Conduct for Political Parties (662/2009), the Political Parties Registration Proclamation (573/2008), the Proclamation to Establish the Procedure for Peaceful Demonstration and Public Political Meeting (3/1991), the Registration and Regulation of Charities and Societies Proclamation (621/2009), the Anti-Terrorism Law Proclamation (652/2009), the Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation (590/2008) and other provisions of the 2004 Criminal Code.

The Constitution of the country categorically states that power emanates only from the ballot box. Besides, the government has built up vital democratic institutions to realize fair elections, ensure press freedom and put in place independent judiciary system, among others. Similarly, National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) was established by the parliament and is entrusted to conduct fair and credible elections throughout the country. The board has strong working relation with mass media, civic organizations and political parties.

NEBE has been employing better mechanism of resolving grievances that may occur during the run of the electoral process. This enables political parties to express their concern about the election process. And the Secretariat is ready to consider any concern forwarded from legally registered political parties. There is grievance hearing committees at every polling station, constituency, and regional board offices. So anybody

who has compliant on the process can apply to this appeal hearing committees step by step. Then the compliant will be solved according to the law.

Starting from the capacity building trainings; parties' registration, deputies' registration, voters' registration, preparation of election officials and observers, distribution of election materials and many other issues had been held successfully. The board said it is proud of this successful process. Concerning this all works done before, the comments from the stake holders are very appreciative and most of them admitted the fruitfulness of the process.

From all this election works the process of voting, counting and result announcement need more attention and everybody become sensitive when it come to this point. The board understands the seriousness of the stage and it is working to the top of its level to fulfill the responsibility given by the people of Ethiopia and the constitution.

The tremendous effort of the government and people to make the election free and peaceful is of great importance to all parties that run their activities in line with the code of conduct and legal parameters of the country.

According to Ethiopian Broadcast Authority, the statistics organized related to air time usage during election showed that the parties have used most of the allocated time to publicize their programs and access the greater public.

Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority and the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) in collaboration had organized press conference on occasion of the conclusion of the election in May 2015 designed to assess the level of free air time and news paper column utilization of contesting parties.

Ethiopian Broadcast Authority (EBA) said EPRDF has fully utilized the conducive environment created for the election related to party-program promotion. In the contrary, contesting parties have squandered the same opportunity and their performance related to

media usage is low. Even, some 8 parties did not use any of the air time and news paper column allocated to them.

In addition, some parties ascribed their failure to abide by the election code of conduct to censure. So far only two parties have filed their grievance, even though proper complaint handling system is established,

EBA stated that the Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) has managed to use over 86 percent of its allotted air time in the television, radio, and news paper column.

According to EBA EPRDF Affiliate parties have used 63 percent of the air time and news paper column allocated for the election.

Over all the country’s air time and news paper column usage stands over 70 and it is very much encouraging compared to the previous same elections. And the political parties had conducted their promotion in an encouraging manner. Hence, over all the reports publicized by public and private media houses was balanced, credible and truthful. The civic education offered to the voter public was also assessed as good. The media houses have undertaken strengthening activities to enhance rule of law, to avail wider space to political parties and offer quick reply.

Here is an outline of post-election air time and news paper column usage.

Name of the political party	Radioሬዲዮ	TV	Newspaper	Average utilization	Percent not utilized by parties
	Utilization in percent	Utilization in percent	Utilization in percent		
EPRDF	99.4	98.3	95	98	2

EPRDF-Affiliate Parties	68.4	72	48	63	37
Contesting Parties	47.5	65.2	39.4	51	49
Total	75.2	82.3	72	70.7	29.3

Generally, 1165 election promotion programs were publicized out of 1185 programs intended to the election. Hence, the overall performance related to election promotion stands good.

Ethiopia has invited all organizations and countries interested to observe election including Carter Center, the EU and the African Union, but some refrained from observing the election. However, national civic societies and organizations and the African Union Election Observation Mission(AUOM) have properly observed the 5th Parliamentary Elections.

In line with the election, United States has commended the people of Ethiopia for their civic participation in generally peaceful parliamentary and regional elections on May 24. It acknowledges the National Electoral Board's organizational efforts and the African Union's role as the only international observer mission on the ground.

It also notes the importance of the nine televised party debates as progress in fostering open public discussion of the challenges facing the country. And it encourages all candidates, political parties and their supporters to resolve any outstanding differences or concerns peacefully in accordance with Ethiopia's constitution and laws (parallel to stating its concern for civil society, media, opposition parties, and independent voices and views).

The United States has a broad and strong partnership with Ethiopia and its people. It said it remains committed to working with the Ethiopian Government and its people to strengthen Ethiopia's democratic institutions, improve press freedom, and promote a more

open political environment consistent with Ethiopia's international human rights obligations.

At the invitation of the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, the African Union Commission Chairperson, H.E. Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma deployed an African Union Election Observation Mission (AUEOM) to the 24 May 2015 Parliamentary elections in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

The Mission was headed by H.E. Hifikepunye Pohamba, former President of the Republic of Namibia and comprised 50 Short-Term Observers (STOs) and 9 Long-Term Observers (LTOs) drawn from the Pan-African Parliament, Election Management Bodies, Civil Society Organizations, Human Rights Institutions, Think Tanks and experts from different African Countries. The Mission was supported by a technical team drawn from the Department of Political Affairs of the African Union Commission (AUC).

The mission was mandated to observe the 24 May 2015 Parliamentary Elections in Ethiopia in conformity with the provisions of the Constitutive Act of the Union adopted in July 2000; the OAU/AU Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa (AHG/Decl.1 XXXVIII) as adopted by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union and the African Union Guidelines for Election Observation and Monitoring Missions, both adopted in July 2002; the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, which entered into force on 15 February, 2012.

The Mission is also guided by other relevant regional and international instruments governing the conduct of elections such as the Universal Declarations of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 1948, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which entered into force in March 1976; the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and its accompanying Code of Conduct endorsed by the AU in 2005; and the Constitution and National Laws of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Ethiopia has also acceded to the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and subjected itself to voluntary assessment.

In fulfilling its mandate as stipulated in the afore-mentioned instruments; the objective of the mission is to make an independent, impartial and objective assessment of the 24 May 2015 Parliamentary elections in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

The African Union (AU) deployed nine (9) Long-Term Observers on 19 April 2015 to observe the pre-election phase of the electoral cycle and will remain in the country until 7 June 2015 to observe the immediate post-election phase.

Fifty AU Short-Term Observers arrived in Addis Ababa on 17 and 18 May 2015 and held a three-day briefing and orientation program from 19 – 21 May 2015. This program provided an opportunity for a refresher training of observers on the African Union observation methodology and AU Code of Conduct for observers before deployment. It was also an opportunity for observers to be briefed by national stakeholders.

The Observers received comprehensive briefing from the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE); representatives of political parties and candidates; senior officers of the Federal, Regional and district police; members of the diplomatic Corps, representatives from civic organizations including women and youth associations; the media and its regulating body; the Ethiopia Broadcasting Authority; the national office of the Ombudsman and academia.

The Head of Mission held high-level consultations with key stakeholders including the Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the President of the Supreme Court of Ethiopia, the Speaker of the Peoples' House of Assembly, the African Diplomatic Missions in Ethiopia, Human Rights Commission and leadership of some political parties.

On 22 May 2015, the Mission deployed 29 observer teams, each comprised of two observers to the 2 administrative cities of Ethiopia namely Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa and 8 of the 9 regions of Ethiopia namely Amhara, Benishangul- Gumuz, Gambella, Harari, Oromia, SNNPR, Somali and Tigray. However, the mission could not deploy in Afar Region due to logistical constraints. While in the field, observers consulted with regional and

constituency level officials of NEBE, the police and other relevant stakeholders. And, on Election Day, the team visited 356 polling stations in their areas of deployment.

Fulfilling their duty, AU STOs returned to Addis Ababa on 25 May 2015 for a debriefing session where they reported back on their findings and shared their overall assessment of the elections, while the LTOs remained in the field to observe the vote tabulation process.

This statement presents the Mission's preliminary findings up until the close of polling on 24 May 2015. These findings are based on data gathered through direct observations and consultation with relevant stakeholders. A final report of the Mission's assessment of the elections will be published within two (2) months of the announcement of the final results on the African Union website and shared with the Ethiopian Authorities.

The Mission noted concerns raised by some political parties and interlocutors regarding some sections of the Media law, the Anti-Terrorism law and the Charity and Society Law, which they argued limits the rights to effective citizens' participation in political activities.

For the Anti Terrorism Proclamation (ATP), the interlocutors pointed to Articles 14, 17, 18 and 22, which they argue infringes on their rights of privacy, while the State argues that ATP takes into account the challenge of combating terrorism and protecting fundamental rights of its citizens. On the Charity and Society Law, interlocutors argue that the limit of external funding to 10% undermines their ability to adequately implement their programmes.

Ethiopia follows a first-past-the-post electoral system. The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia under Article 56 stipulates that a Political Party or a Coalition of Political Parties that has the greatest number of seats in the House of People's Representatives shall form the Government. Furthermore, the Amended Electoral Law of Ethiopia, Proclamation no 532/2007 states that a Candidate who receives more votes within a Constituency shall be declared the winner (Article 25).

The Mission noted that the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia was adequately prepared to conduct the 24 May 2015 elections in the regions observed. It was further noted that"

the Electoral Board undertook a post-election evaluation in 2011, immediately after the 2010 election. This evaluation served as a basis for electoral reforms including political party funding, redistribution of media airtime for political party campaign and voter education in the different languages of Ethiopia.

The Mission was informed that there are 547 constituencies across the country, 45,795 polling stations and 226,000 election officers. Article 22 (6) of the Amended Electoral Law (Proclamation No. 532/2007) states that a maximum of 1,000 voters shall be registered in one polling station.

The AUEOM noted with satisfaction that out of the 37 million eligible voters, a total of 36.8 million voters were registered for the 2015 elections. The Mission commends the NEBE for registering up to 99.5% of eligible voters in these elections. The Mission is also encouraged that 48% of the registered voters are women although women represented only 27.9% of candidates.

Cognizant of the fact that civic registration in Ethiopia is localized and manually done, the AUEOM noted that the voters' register is also manually done and it is localized per polling station. The absence of a centralized voters' register makes it difficult for parties, independent observers and other stakeholders to undertake an audit to confirm its authenticity.

The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) has the mandate to undertake civic and voter education as provided in Article 89 of the Amended Electoral Law (2007). To this end, NEBE carried out continuous voter education from 2011 mainly on the legal framework and produced manuals for training in different languages taking into consideration the diversity of languages in the country. This enabled NEBE to reach out to new voters as well as ensured that interaction between NEBE and potential voters was done in languages that are comfortable to the voters.

The Mission noted that NEBE and Civil Society collaborated in the design and production of voter education manuals that were used for voter education as provided in Article 89 (2) of

the Amended Electoral Law (2007) and Article 2 (4) (a) of the Regulation on the Procedure for Licensing and the Code of Conduct for Civic and Voter Education (Regulation No. 2/2010). The Mission recognizes that Civil Society Organizations play an important role in strengthening democracy and they further complimented the efforts of NEBE in terms of reaching out to the voters.

The 2015 Parliamentary elections have seen an increase in number of registered parties. The NEBE registered 58 contesting political parties for the 2015 elections of which 23 parties are contesting at the national level and 35 parties are contesting at the regional level.

The Mission noted that 5,819 candidates contested in the 24 May 2015 elections out of which 4,549 were males and 1,270 females. To this end, 3,991 candidates contested at the federal level while 1,828 contested at the regional level.

The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (Article 31) guarantees citizens the right to freedom of associations of their choices on the basis of politics, gender, age, profession, trade, development, charity, special needs and other diverse areas.

Article 59 of the Ethiopian Electoral Law stipulates that political organizations and candidates' supporters are entitled to free access and use of state owned media. The mass media and journalists are guided by a code of conduct derived from elections regulations number 6/2010. The code lays emphasis on ethical reporting, peaceful electoral process as opposed to focusing their attention to financial interests.

The observer notes that the Ethiopia Broadcasting Authority, which also oversees the media compliance to the code of conduct, regulates the media in Ethiopia. The Mission commends NEBE, the Ministry of Information and the Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority for allocating 600 hours of free electronic media airtime and 700 columns in the state owned print media for all political parties contesting in the elections.

The allocation was based on the following criteria: 10 % for all parties equally, 40% dependent on the number of seats in the House of Peoples' Representatives or the Regional

Councils; 40% based on the number of candidates fielded by the party; and 10% for female candidates.

The Mission further informed that some political parties were unable to fully utilize the free airtime on electronic media and columns provided. The Ethiopia Broadcasting Authority (EBA) further stated that 8 political parties did not utilize the free airtime (0%) allocated to them, out of which 6 were from the regional level by the end of the second month of the campaign period.

In its consultation with the EBA, the AUEOM was informed that some political party campaign messages submitted to the media houses did not meet the requirements set by EBA and therefore could not be transmitted without revision. However, some political parties confirmed that some media houses were unable to air their campaign messages, as they were not willing to revise their messages as required by the EBA.

The AUEOM notes with satisfaction that there has been an increase in the number of women elected to the House of Peoples' Assembly from 11 in 1995, 42 in 2000, and 117 in 2005 to 152 in 2010.

The Mission commends the NEBE for putting in place initiatives to enhance participation of women candidates in the 2015 elections through increased public funding for women candidates from 10% in 2010 to 15% in 2015. It was further noted that the Board provided a special allocation of 10% free airtime for women candidates on electronic and print media.

Furthermore, the Mission commends the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia for ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and encourages the state to ratify the Maputo Protocol on Women" on the rights of women in Africa.

The AUEOM notes that for the 2015 elections, only 27.9% of the total 5819 candidates contesting the elections were women. It is important to note that while there has been progress, this still falls short of the gender parity principle enshrined in the Constitutive

Act of the African Union. The Mission therefore encourages political parties and the Ethiopian authorities to adopt further measures to achieve gender parity within party structures and elective offices.

On Election Day, the 29 AU observer teams visited 356 polling stations in their areas of deployment to observe all Election Day procedures. Some 64.5% of the polling stations visited by the AUEOM was located in rural areas and 35.5% were located in urban areas. The AUEOM noted that Election Day proceeded in a peaceful and calm atmosphere without reports of major incidences. The AUEOM commends the NEBE for the satisfactory technical conduct of the elections.

The AUEOM noted that 98.7% of the polling stations visited opened on time and all election materials were delivered on schedule and in appropriate quantities. No more than 2 polling stations out of the 27 observed by the AUEOM for opening opened slightly late. This delay was caused by polling staff still setting up.

Polling personnel at these stations explained that voters (women in particular) arrived early and demanded to vote immediately to enable them return to their daily routine; despite the Board being the only authorized body to make decisions in this regard. While it is encouraging to observe the eagerness of voters to exercise their right to vote, opening polls early compromises the principle of equity as all voters should be given the same hours of polling.

Voting Process

The observing mission said it witnessed the professionalism with which polling staff carried out their tasks. All voting procedures were largely in conformity with the guidelines set by the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia.

In some 69% of polling stations visited, there were queues of citizens waiting to cast their vote. The polling stations were laid out in a manner, which allowed easy flow of voters; however, in a few cases, it was reported that the space provided was small thus easily overcrowded. It was observed in some of the polling stations visited that the number of

voters exceeded 1000 as stipulated in article 22(6) of the Proclamation no. 532/2007. This contributed to the overcrowding witnessed in some stations.

The AUEOM observed that voters requiring assistance were provided with help in 60% of cases by a person of their choice and in 40% of cases they were assisted by polling staff. Most polling stations were accessible to persons living with disabilities and priority was given to them as well as the elderly, pregnant women and nursing mothers. The domestic and public observers were present in most of the polling stations visited.

Similarly, the mission noticed the presence of party and candidate agents in all the stations visited. It was further noted that women were particularly underrepresented among party and candidate agents as they accounted for only 20% of the agents in the polling stations visited. Thus revealing once more that political parties need to be more inclusive of women. This notion can be reiterated in the number of female candidates contesting the elections.

Cognizant that tabulation of results is currently on-going, the AUEOM encourages Political Parties, Candidates, their Supporters and the Electorate to maintain the prevailing atmosphere of peace that characterized pre-election and Election Day and urges for the use of the legal channels of complaints and appeals should there be any post electoral disputes.

The AUEOM also congratulates the Government, nations, nationalities and peoples of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia for the holding of another periodic election as provided for by the Constitution.

The Ethiopian Parliamentary elections were organized and conducted in accordance with the constitutional and legal provisions as well as the rule and regulations governing the conduct of elections in Ethiopia, as were generally consistent with the AU Guidelines on the Conduct of Elections in Africa.

The Ethiopian public observers and civil societies have unanimously said that Parliamentary Elections were calm, peaceful, and credible as it provided an opportunity for the Ethiopian people to express their choices at the polls.