**A. INTRODUCTION**

The African Union Election Observation Mission (AUEOM) was deployed to the Republic of Namibia from the 21 November 2024— on the invitation of the Government of the Republic of Namibia and the Electoral Commission of Namibia(ECN) . The Mission is led by H.E. Dr. Speciosa Kazibwe Wandira, former Vice President of the Republic of Uganda. The Mission comprises of 47 short-term observers (STOs) drawn from ambassadors accredited to the African Union, members of the Pan African Parliament (PAP), officials of election management bodies, members of African civil society organisations, African election experts, gender and media experts, and representatives of youth organizations from 23 AU Member States.

The objective of the AUEOM is to assess the technical compliance of the 2024  General Election in line with relevant AU instruments such as: the 2002 African Union Guidelines for Election Observation and Monitoring Missions; the 2002 OAU/AU Declaration on Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa;  the 1981 African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR); the 2007 African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG); regional and other international instruments; as well as Namibia’s national legal framework for elections.

As part of its methodology, from 22 to 23 November 2024, the Mission held a briefing and orientation for the observers on the context and preparations for the elections and observation methodology before deployment to the 14 regions of Namibia. The AUEOM also engaged with key electoral stakeholders, who included: the; Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN) ; the Namibian Police Force; political parties , Civil Society Organization (CSOs);  representatives of the international community; citizens' observer groups; other observer missions; and, the academia. On election day, the AUEOM deployed 19 teams of observers across 12 regions (22 constituencies) to observe key processes including the final phases of the electoral campaigns, the opening, polling and closing processes.

This Preliminary Statement represents the Mission’s immediate findings and assessment of the conduct of the 27 November 2024 Presidential and National Assembly Elections. Cognizant of the fact that the electoral process is still on going, this statement is not the overall or final assessment of the electoral process. The Mission will continue to observe the immediate post-election environment, including the results management process and resolution of electoral disputes if any. To improve future electoral processes in Namibia, a final comprehensive report on the Mission’s overall findings and recommendations will be issued one month after the announcement of the final results.

**B. PRELIMINARY FINDINGS**

The AUEOM makes the following preliminary observations:

(a) Political Context of the Elections

Since independence in 1990, Namibia has conducted seven general elections—six of which has been worn by the ruling Southwest Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO). The political landscape for the 2024 election was notably shaped by a number of issues namely, past unfulfilled political promises, youth unemployment and land ownership.

(b) Legal Framework

The legal framework governing the 2024 General Election is embedded in Article 94B of the Namibian Constitution, and Electoral Act No. 5 of 2014 as amended in 2024. The Electoral Act outlines procedures for the establishment the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN), voter registration, voting, vote counting, and the declaration of results. The Regional Council Act No.22 of 1992 and Local Authority Council Act No. 23 of 1992 govern Regional and Local Authorities elections. Other substantive and operational laws include the Public Procurement Act No.15 of 2015 and the State Finance Act No.31 of 1991.

The AUEOM notes that Namibia’s legal framework is generally in line with international, continental, and regional norms and standards for the conduct of democratic elections. Further, the legal framework recognises and guarantees fundamental human rights and freedoms including, freedom of speech, association, movement, and political rights.

(c) Electoral System

The electoral system in Namibia is a combination of a pluralist system for presidential election, majoritarian for regional elections and proportional representation for National and Local Authority elections. The President is elected through a two-round system—where a candidate must secure more than 50% of the vote in the first round. If no candidate achieves this majority, a run-off is held. The National Assembly members are elected by closed list proportional representation from the 14 multi-member constituencies based on the regions. The National Assembly consists of 104 seats, 96 are directly elected while eight members are appointed by the president.

(d) Election Administration

The Mission noted, that in line with the legal provisions, the ECN, in preparation for the 2024 elections undertook several activities including voter registration, voter and civic education, nomination of political parties and candidates for elections and establishment of polling stations.

Regarding funding for elections, the Mission noted confirmation by ECN that the government provided the entire budget for the Presidential and National Assembly Elections.

(i) Voter Registration

Section 26 (3) of the Electoral Act No. 5 of 2014, provides for registration of Namibian citizens aged 18 years and above as provided by Article 17 (2) of the Namibian Constitution. Namibian citizens temporarily living outside Namibia are eligible to register as voters under Section 23 of the Act.  The ECN registered 1,449,569 voters representing 90% of eligible voters, 56% female, 46% male. The youth comprised 58% of those registered. Out of the total registered voters 16,106 were persons with disabilities—including the visual and hearing-impaired. In addition, 1,348 citizens living outside Namibia were registered.

The Mission noted that the ECN shared a soft copy of the register of voters with political parties. The register was also displayed for public scrutiny. No objection was registered.

On polling stations, the Mission noted that the ECN established 4,677 polling stations—with 1,621 fixed while 3,056 are mobile. The mobile stations are supposed to ensure that the nomadic communities are not disfranchised.

(ii) Political Party and Candidate Nominations

According to Section 136 of the Electoral Act No. 5 of 2014, political parties intending to take part in elections must, in the prescribed application form and in the prescribed manner, apply to the Commission for registration in accordance with this Act. In line with this legal provision, the ECN finalised nomination of independent candidates and political parties on 14 and 16 October, 2024. 21 political parties were cleared to contest for the National Assembly and 15 for presidential election. Further, the Mission noted that nomination of political parties and candidates was carried out in a peaceful manner.

(e) Election Campaigns and Campaign Finance

Campaigns were guided by the Code of Conduct for Political Parties. The electoral campaign commenced on 27 September 2024 and ended on 26 November 2024.The AUEOM noted that parties campaigned freely without restriction and the campaign process was generally peaceful with no major incidents reported.

Sections 140, 141, 150 – 161 of the Electoral Act provides for the funding of parties and requirement to disclose their sources of funding. The ECN monitors compliance and ensures transparency. The Mission noted there is no law limiting campaign expenditure by political parties and candidates. This may create uneven playing field.

(f) Inclusion in the Electoral Process

a) Gender

The participation of women is noted in voter registration where 54% of the registered voters are women while 46% are male. However, challenges persist in achieving equal representation in political leadership especially in regional councils and local authorities. Of the 15 presidential candidates in the race, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, the SWAPO candidate is the only female contender.

b) Youth

The Mission noted the ECN’s effort to encourage the youth to participate in the electoral processes by appointing a lead youth ambassador and 70 youth ambassadors spread throughout the country to encourage their peers to register as voters and participate in the General Election.

The Mission also noted that political parties have taken a step in promoting youth representation by nominating some youth to contest for national assembly elections.

The ECN’s decision to recruit only unemployed youth as polling officials was noted as a positive step in involving and encouraging the youth to participate in the electoral process.

c) Voters with Special Needs

The disaggregation of registered voters with disability enables ECN to map the stations with voters with specific disabilities and hence cater for their needs at the polling station level.

The Mission also noted ECN’s initiative to encourage people with disabilities to participate in the electoral processes by use of slogans that are appealing in voter education such as the "Touch and Feel” slogan for visually impaired voters. Voter and civic education materials availed in braille while sign language was used to cater for the hearing impaired.

(g) The Media Environment

The media landscape during the 2024 elections is characterized by diverse platforms, including traditional media such as radio, television, and newspapers, as well as digital and electronic media. The Mission notes the wide penetration of the internet in the country standing at 52% of the population. The ECN uses electronic and digital media to disseminate electoral information is commendable. Accredited media personnel are expected to adhere to the electoral code of conduct, ensuring impartial and responsible reporting.

(h) The Role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

The Mission acknowledges the collaboration of ECN and CSOs in dissemination of voter and civic education. However, the Mission met with the CSO leaders who reported that their capacity was limited by inadequate funding.

**C. VOTING**

i. Special Voting

In line with Section 64 (2) (a-c) of the Electoral Act, the Special voting was held for military personnel, police officers, sea goers, correctional services officers and Namibians in the diaspora on the 13 November 2024. Overall, the ECN established 33 polling stations across 14 regions, and 35 Namibian embassies abroad to facilitate voting. There were reports of shortage of ballot papers experienced during the special voting, this was attributed to the high expected number turning out to participate in the special vote.

The Mission notes the concern raised about release of the special voting results could lead to victimisation and influence voting on the election day. ECN clarified that the results were not officially announced but according to legal requirement after conclusion of counting, result forms are supposed to be pinned outside the polling station thus becoming public.

ii. Election Day Observation

On the election day, the AUEOM dispatched 19 teams to 12 regions to observe the opening of polling stations, voting, closing, and counting procedures in urban, semi-urban and rural areas as well as monitor the environment in and around polling stations.

iii. Opening of Polling

The Mission observed the opening procedures in 19 polling stations across the Namibia's 12 regions.

The Mission noted that 15 (79%) of the polling stations visited opened on time, at 07.00hrs, with only 5 (21%) opening late due to inadequate preparations  by the polling staff and late arrival of party polling agents. The polling staff followed the required opening procedures and guidelines.

iv. Election Material

The Mission observed that materials were delivered in advance in 278 (89%) and in sufficient quantities at the polling stations visited. Of the polling stations visited, 34 (11%) ran out of materials, including ballot papers, ballot boxes, lack of batteries for ultra violet light, and voters’ roll—amongst others. These resulted in interruption of the voting process.

v. Polling stations

The AUEOM noted that 84% of the polling stations were easily accessible to voters. However, 16% of the polling stations were not accessible, especially to PwDs and the elderly. The distance between the polling stations was considerable.

The secrecy of the vote was guaranteed by the appropriate lay-out in most of the polling stations visited.

vi. Polling Procedures

There were no campaign materials or campaigning within the radius of 500 metres off polling stations visited by the AUEOM. Priority was given to voters with special needs, the elderly, and expectant and nursing mothers. Assistance was also provided to voters who required such support, including the virtually impaired.

The Mission noted duplication of procedures in verification of voters using the ultra violet light to check voters' fingers and the verification using the machines for the same purpose across all stations visited.

The Mission observed inconsistency in the application of voting procedures in some stations. In some stations, voters were issued with the presidential and national assembly to proceed to mark their ballots, while in others, voters were issued with each ballot paper separately.

vii. Polling Personnel

There was an average of seven polling staff in all stations visited. The AUEOM noted that all polling stations visited had full complement, majority of whom were women (63%).

viii. Political Party/Candidate Agents

There was a presence of polling agents in the stations visited. SWAPO, IPC, LPM and PDM were represented in all the stations observed by the Mission.

ix. The Mission observed that a significant number of the polling agents were women. The international observation groups and local observers were granted access to all polling stations visited.

x. Security

Security personnel presence was noted in all the polling stations visited from opening to closing of the polls. Their presence was observed to be non-intrusive in 293 (94%) of the stations.

x. Closing of the Polls and Counting

The Mission observed the closing process in 11 polling stations, seven in urban, two in peri-urban and two in rural areas.

The Mission noted that seven of polling stations visited closed at 21.00 hrs, the legally stipulated time. The Mission observed that there were voters in the queues at the closing of polls in some polling stations visited on 27 November. All voters in the queues at the closing time were allowed to cast their vote.

The Mission observed that some stations closed and began counting before receiving communication on extension. The ECN announced an extension of polling hours to accommodate the slow processing of voters and long queues. The AUEOM notes that the ECN’s communication regarding extension was not communicated in a timely manner to voters and polling staff.

**D.  PREVIOUS AU RECOMMENDATIONS**

Before sharing the current recommendations, the AUEOM presents the recommendations of the  2019 Presidential and National Assembly Elections which emphasized the need for electoral stakeholders and institutions to do the following:

? Provide for the continuous update of the voters register in order to ensure that voters have valid voters cards;

? Ensure transparency in the nomination process through regular and timely interface with political parties whenever the conduct of the process deviates from previously established processes;

? Consider political party funding modalities with the aim of ensuring a level playing field;

? Limit the number of voters per polling station through considering the use of a polling station segmented voters register;

? Consider introducing the Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) component to the Electronic Voter Machines with the aim of improving transparency and building trust in the voting process;

? Familiarize voters with the Electronic Voter Machines through increased voter education that allows for regular interface with the voting machines;

? Hold consultative post-election dialogues with political parties in order to identify gaps in the legal framework.

The AU Mission offers the following preliminary recommendations:

? Limit the number of voters per polling station through considering the use of a polling station segmented voters register;

? Provide sufficient polling booths in each polling station to speed up voting;

? Limit the locating of polling stations to public facilities. Polling stations should also be in places with access to basic amenities such as places of convenience and water.

? Whenever an extension of polling becomes necessary, it should be communicated in a timely and effective manner.

For the ongoing elections, we make the following observations beginning with commendable practices:

? The 2024 General Elections took place in a calm and peaceful political environment similar to previous elections.

? The civility with which political parties and citizens went about electoral campaigns were very critical to the peaceful nature of the elections.

? The healthy collaboration and consultation between the ECN and political actors is worthy of mention.

? The high number of citizens who registered to take part in the elections, majority of whom were the youth and women show the commitment of Namibians to democracy.

? The high participation of youth and women as voters, election personnel, party agents and observers (particularly from the Namibia Institute for Democracy (NID) was a landmark development in the electoral process.

? Offering opportunity for citizens in correctional facilities, health centres and citizens in the diaspora to vote enhanced political participation. Not many African countries do so.

? The inclusion of people with disabilities as polling staff.

? On election day, Namibians demonstrated exceptional patience and calm while having to queue for long hours in harsh weather conditions.

**E. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

a. Conclusion

The Mission observed that the elections were conducted in an environment that is generally peaceful and in compliance with the legal framework for the elections in the country.

The AUEOM commends the commitment, resilience and enthusiasm demonstrated by th people of Namibia who in the face of extreme heat and logistical challenges braved the long queues to ensure they exercise their democratic right.

The Mission offers the following preliminary recommendations.

b. Recommendations

The Government and Parliament of Namibia

i. Consider enacting a legislation that provides for when the results should be announced;

ii. Amend the Electoral Act to provide for the special votes to be counted and tallied together with votes cast on the election day;

iii. Amend the Electoral Act / Regulations to provide for the inclusion of Medical Personnel among those eligible for Special Voting;

iv. The Mission reiterates its previous recommendation to consider political party funding modalities with the aim of ensuring a level playing field

Political Parties

i. The Mission reiterate to political parties to adopting women friendly policies and practises in efforts to break down barriers that make it difficult for women to contest internal party elections and national elections;

ii. Consider drawing up a rotation plan for party and candidates agents deployed at polling stations to enhance credibility and transparency of the election day processes;

iii. Channel any arising electoral disputes through legally instituted mechanisms.

The Electoral Commission of Namibia

i. Review electoral logistics and operations strategy to ensure the timely deployment of materials and adequate training of staff to ensure uniform application of polling procedures.

ii. Consider increasing the number of pilling stations to help reduce long queue lengths outside polling stations.

iii. Consider segmenting the voting population into numbers that enable prediction of quantities of polling materials and human resource person hours required to efficiently execute the voting exercise.

**Issued in Windhoek, Namibia, on 29 November 2024**

**Dr. Speciosa Kazibwe Wandira, Head of African Union Election Observation Mission (Former Vice President of the Republic of Uganda)**