



PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

BY

**THE HEAD OF THE SADC ELECTORAL OBSERVATION MISSION
(SEOM)**

TO

**THE 2024 PRESIDENTIAL AND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS
OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA**

**HONOURABLE ANNE SEMAMBA MAKINDA, FORMER SPEAKER
OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF
TANZANIA**

WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA, 29TH NOVEMBER 2024

Your Excellency Dr. Speciosa Naigaga Wandira Kazibwe, former Vice President of the Republic of Uganda and Head of the African Union Election Observation Mission to the Presidential and National Assembly Elections of the Republic of Namibia.

Honourable Judge Priscilla Makanyara Chigumba, Chairperson of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission and Head of the Electoral Commissions Forum of Southern African Countries Observation Mission to the Presidential and National Assembly Elections of the Republic of Namibia.

Honourable Tshepo Monethi, former President of the Senate of the Kingdom of Lesotho and Head of the African Centre for Governance Election Mission to the Presidential and National Assembly Elections of the Republic of Namibia.

Distinguished Members of the SADC Organ Troika;

Your Excellency, Elias Magosi, Executive Secretary of SADC;

The Chairperson Electoral Commission of Namibia

Distinguished Heads of International Electoral Observation Missions;

Your Excellencies, Heads and Representatives of the Diplomatic Missions accredited to the Republic of Namibia;

Members of the SADC Electoral Advisory Council;

SADC Election Observers;

Leaders and Representatives of Political Parties;

Religious Leaders and Members of the Civil Society;

Members of the media;

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I. INTRODUCTION

On behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and as mandated by Her Excellency Dr. Samia Suluhu Hassan, President of the United Republic of Tanzania and the Chairperson of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation, it is my honour to welcome you to the release of the Preliminary Statement of the SADC Electoral Observation Mission (SEOM) on the conduct of the 27 November 2024 Presidential and National Assembly Elections in the Republic of Namibia.

As Head of Mission, I am supported by representatives from the Republics of Malawi and Zambia, and the United Republic of Tanzania, who are members of the SADC Organ Troika. The SEOM received expert advice from the SADC Electoral Advisory Council (SEAC).

The Mission comprises 65 observers from eight SADC Member States, namely the Kingdom of Eswatini, the Republics of Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe, and the United Republic of Tanzania. These observers were deployed across all fourteen (14) regions of the Republic of Namibia. The Mission observed the Presidential and National Assembly Elections in accordance with the Revised SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections (2021) and the laws of the Republic of Namibia.

As part of its mandate, the Mission engaged key stakeholders in Namibia, including the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN), the Government of Namibia specifically, the Ministry of International Relations and Cooperation and the Attorney General, the Police Heads and Representatives of the Diplomatic Missions accredited to the Republic of Namibia; political parties, civil society organisations, faith-based organisations, academia, and the media.

This Preliminary Statement covers the Mission's observations of the pre-election period and voting day activities. The SEOM final report will include our observations

of the post-election processes, which include the results management and announcement processes.

II. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The SEOM observed the following:

(a) The Political and Security Environment

The Mission observed that the country was calm and peaceful during the pre-election and election day. Political campaigns were conducted peacefully.

The Mission noted submissions from stakeholders that the country was experiencing active involvement of the youth in politics.

(b) Electoral Legal Framework

The Presidential and National Assembly Elections are mainly governed by the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia and the Electoral Act 5 of 2014 (Electoral Act).

The Mission noted that according to Article 28 (2) of the Constitution, the President is elected by direct, universal and equal suffrage on obtaining more than fifty (50) per cent of the valid votes cast. If more than fifty (50) per cent is not secured, the President is elected in the second ballot between the two candidates who would have obtained the highest votes in the previous ballot. According to Section 109 (4) of the Electoral Act, if no presidential candidate attains more than fifty per cent of the votes, the second ballot must be conducted within 60 days of announcement of the results.

According to Article 46 (1) (a) of the Constitution, the National Assembly is composed of ninety-six (96) members to be elected by the registered voters through direct and secret ballot. The election of the members in terms of Article 46(1)(a) is based on political party lists and in accordance with the principle of proportional representation.

(c) Management of the Electoral Process

The Mission observed that the elections are managed by the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN), which, according to the law, is the exclusive body that directs, supervises, manages and controls elections and referenda.

The ECN consists of five Commissioners, including the Chairperson, appointed by the President with the approval of the National Assembly. In terms of Article 94B(2) of the Constitution, the ECN must be an independent, transparent, and impartial election management body.

(d) Matters arising from the stakeholder's engagements:

(i) Voter Registration

The Mission noted that the final voters' register indicated 1,449,569 registered voters, representing approximately 90% of 1,615,910 eligible voters from the 2023 census.

(ii) Civic and Voter Education

The Mission observed extensive civic and voter education by the ECN. Stakeholders shared several initiatives to inform citizens about the electoral process; however, some reports indicated that some remote areas may not have received adequate coverage.

(iii) Preparedness of the ECN

- (a) During the pre-election period, the Mission noted that the stakeholders had confidence in how the elections had been organised and conducted. Most stakeholders commended the ECN for being professional and transparent. However, most of the stakeholders raised concerns citing inefficiencies within the ECN, which they believed may have caused changes in the implementation of some of the processes, such as the procurement method of the printing of ballot papers.
- (b) The Mission noted the last-minute threat of temporary polling staff to withdraw their services due to their demand for higher remuneration. The Mission also noted that operational matters such as contracting the temporary staff could have been done earlier to give enough room for negotiations. Nevertheless, the Mission appreciated that the ECN came to an agreement with the aggrieved temporary staff.
- (c) The Mission noted that the voting on 27 November 2024 was characterised by operational lapses such as a shortage of ballot papers at polling stations, heating of tablets, running out of batteries for the

ultraviolet light torches and mobile polling stations leaving before some voters had cast their vote.

(iv) Gender representation

Our Mission noted that Namibia scored highly in regional and global assessments of the representation of women in elected political positions, particularly in the National Assembly and, consequently, in the Cabinet. However, our Mission has also noted that most political parties do not implement policies to ensure gender representation, which may reverse the strides made by the country.

(v) Media

The Mission noted the general positive assessment of the media as media houses strived to cover all political parties; however, there were some concerns about unequal coverage in the state owned media. The Mission also noted that some political parties relied on social media to communicate their political messages.

(vi) Electoral Law

The Mission noted concerns by some stakeholders that while the law clearly articulates procedures during and after elections, there were still areas that could be improved to provide clarity and certainty, for instance, provisions on tendered votes, the period within which results ought to be announced and management of the period between the announcement of results and the swearing in of office bearers.

III. OBSERVATIONS ON ELECTION DAY

On Election Day, 27 November 2024, the SADC Electoral Observation Mission (SEOM) observed the voting process in all 14 Regions of the Republic of Namibia. The SADC observer teams covered 221 polling stations and observed the following:

Opening procedures were observed in 16 polling stations:

- (i) 62.5% of polling stations opened on time, 0700 hours. However, 37.5% opened late due to delays caused by the late arrival of party agents, poor preparations by polling officials, and occasional scuffles in queues outside polling stations.
- (ii) Long queues were observed at all polling stations before opening.
- (iii) In all the observed polling stations during the opening, the presiding officers showed the empty ballot boxes to all present before locking and sealing them.
- (iv) The voters' roll was not displayed at any of the polling stations observed. Our observers were informed that the voters' roll was not displayed because voters were allowed to vote anywhere in the country.
- (v) Voters' fingers were scanned to verify if they had not voted.

Polling procedures were observed in 221 polling stations:

- (i) The environment at the polling stations was relatively calm and peaceful, and no significant incidents of violence or intimidation were observed.
- (ii) 94% of polling stations observed were peaceful and conducive to voting. However, 6% faced issues such as poor crowd control and long queues, which were likely caused by the slow processing of voters.
- (iii) All polling stations observed adhered to regulations prohibiting campaign materials in their vicinity, reflecting strict compliance with electoral guidelines and ensuring a neutral voting environment.
- (iv) Security personnel were present at all polling stations, ensuring a safe environment.
- (v) Accessibility for persons with disabilities was ensured at 87.5% of polling stations, but 12.5% were inaccessible. The inaccessibility arose due to polling

stations being located upstairs with no amenities for disabled persons or in areas with uneven terrain, which posed physical barriers.

- (vi) SEOM observers were allowed full access to observe and interact with presiding officers at 87.5% of polling stations, while 12.5% faced restrictions. In some cases, only one observer per group was allowed inside, while in other instances, SADC observers were denied entry.
- (vii) 87.5% of party/candidate agents and observers were present and actively performing their roles at the opening of polls, while 12.5% were absent.
- (viii) Citizens and international observers were present at 50% of the observed polling stations.
- (i) SEOM noted that all of the polling stations observed during opening had the necessary election material, however, there was a shortage of ballot papers later during the day at some polling stations.

IV. BEST PRACTICE

At this stage, the Mission commends the ECN for extensive civic and voter education, particularly for initiatives such as the voters' booklet and the QR code on the accreditation cards, containing the necessary election information.

ECN also accommodated the visually impaired to vote in secret through the introduction of braille ballot papers, which is in line with the spirit of Article 4.1.1, of the Revised SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections, which *"Encourage the full participation of all citizens in democratic and development processes"*.

The Mission also commends the ECN for a gender inclusive recruitment of electoral personnel. The Mission noted that 65.05 % of the polling officials were female.

V. RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENTS IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

At this juncture, allow me to note that the SEOM is continuing the process of electoral observation in the post-election phase. As such, the Mission will not render comprehensive recommendations or qualifications for the election at this stage. However, the Mission has observed the following areas of the electoral process and system that relevant stakeholders may wish to consider improving:

1. Enhance Stakeholder Engagement and Communication Protocols

The ECN should establish clear guidelines for engaging stakeholders, ensuring timely and transparent communication, particularly when making significant decisions such as changing counting venues or extending voting periods. Regular briefings or consultations with all stakeholders, including political parties, civil society organizations, and observers, should be institutionalized to maintain trust and credibility.

(a) Tendered Votes

The Government should consider reforming its electoral system as the current system where the country is perceived as one constituency allowing voters to vote in any constituency irrespective of where they are registered creates logistical and administrative challenges such as shortage of ballot papers in some polling stations.

(b) Develop and Implement a Comprehensive Ballot Management Plan

The ECN should adopt a robust ballot paper management strategy to prevent shortages. This includes accurate voter registration data, contingency plans for unexpected surges, and periodic audits of ballot paper distribution. In cases of shortages, all stakeholders must be promptly informed and consulted to maintain transparency and accountability.

(c) Establish a Crisis Management Framework

The ECN should create a formal crisis management framework to address emergencies, such as ballot shortages or the need to extend voting days. This framework should outline procedures for stakeholder consultation, decision-making

timelines, and communication strategies to ensure all affected parties are informed and involved.

(d) Strengthen Trust-Building Measures

To rebuild stakeholder confidence, the ECN should conduct a post-election stakeholder review to address concerns raised during the electoral process. Recommendations from this review should be implemented to prevent recurrence. Furthermore, capacity-building workshops and periodic engagement sessions with stakeholders can enhance mutual understanding and trust in the ECN's processes.

(e) Recruitment of temporary staff

The ECN is advised to arrange contracting modalities for temporary staff early to avoid last-minute contractual disputes.

(f) Establishment of Voting Streams

The ECN is also advised to establish multiple voting streams within polling stations to assist reducing the queues and frustration of voters.

VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Mission noted that owing to operational challenges faced by the ECN, as gazetted on 28 November 2024, the President extended the voting period from 27 to 30 November 2024 at 36 polling stations to enable voters who could not vote on 27 November 2024 to do so.

The Mission commends the Namibian people for maintaining a peaceful political environment during the pre-election period and urges the nation to maintain a peaceful environment during the extended voting period.

In the event of any electoral disputes, the Mission appeals to all contestants to channel their concerns through established legal procedures and processes.

In accordance with *the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections (2021)*, our Final Report will be issued within 30 days of this Preliminary Statement. The SEAC shall return at an appropriate time to undertake a post-election review to determine the extent to which the recommendations of SEOM have been implemented and the nature of support, if any, that the Republic of Namibia may require from the SADC region to implement those proposals.

Thank you very much

Muito Obrigado

Merci beaucoup

Asante Sana