



I- INTRODUCTION

1. The 6 March 2016 Presidential polls conducted in the Republic of Benin did not produce an outright winner, as none of the candidates crossed the absolute majority mark of obtaining more than fifty percent. Going by the results announced by the Constitutional Court, Messrs. Lionel Zinsou and Patrice Talon obtained 27.11 percent and 23.52 percent respectively of the total valid votes cast. Consequently, the Autonomous National Electoral Commission (CENA) fixed a runoff election to hold on 20 March, 2016.

2. In line with the provisions of the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001), His Excellency Kadré Désiré Ouédraogo, President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), then decided to deploy an Election Observation Mission (EOM) for the runoff presidential election of 20 March 2016.

3. The Mission was led by His Excellency Kabine Komara, former Prime Minister of the Republic of Guinea, and comprised 70 short-term observers. The EOM's main objective was to support the Beninese people in sustaining their longstanding democratic tradition by ensuring a smooth, peaceful and successful conduct of the runoff presidential election, as was the case during the first round.

4. The Mission was composed of one member of the ECOWAS Council of the Wise, Ambassadors of Member States accredited to the ECOWAS Commission in Abuja, members of the ECOWAS Parliament and the Community Court of Justice. The Mission also comprised experts from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Election Management Bodies of Member States, as well as representatives of civil society and the media. The Mission was supported by a technical team from the ECOWAS Commission.

II- CONSULTATIONS HELD

5. Together with the Head of Mission of the International Organisation of Francophonie (OIF), the Head of the ECOWAS Observation Mission met with the President of the Autonomous National Electoral Commission (CENA), the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Interior, Public Security, and Worship, as well as leaders of the Civil Society Platform.

The two Heads of Mission also met each of the contesting candidates, Mr. Lionel Zinsou and Mr. Patrice Talon. Furthermore, they held meetings with the Heads of the other Election Observation Missions around, notably the African Union (AU), the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), the International Organisation of the Francophonie (OIF) and the European Union (EU), during which they discussed issues that were likely to contribute to the smooth conduct of the polls.

6. These consultations enabled the Mission to note, among others (i) allegations of voter inducements; (ii) the need to secure the transmission of results and to rapidly provide exit polls; and (iii) the importance of upholding the decisions taken during the first round to allow the use of all authorised voter's cards, in order to facilitate the exercise of voting rights.

7. In addition, the Head of the ECOWAS Observation Mission took part in different initiatives and meetings with other Heads of Missions, with a view to encouraging the stakeholders to create the enabling conditions for peaceful conduct of elections.

8. Following the broad consultations, and the different meetings it held before the polls, the Mission noted:

- the commitment of all the political actors to comply with provisions of the Constitution and the legal framework governing the electoral process, as well as to make every effort to preserve the social peace and national cohesion;
- the release of a Communiqué by CENA authorising the use of all authorised voter's cards and the National Identity card, as was the case during the first round election.

III- ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN AND THE MEDIA

9. The electoral campaign for the second round kicked-off on Tuesday 15 March 2016 and was conducted in a peaceful manner. The candidates had access to the media and were able to campaign across the country. For the first time in the political history of the country, a live-telecast Presidential Debate was organised for the two candidates to afford them the platform to directly inform and reach out to the electorate on their manifestoes and programs. Despite the high stakes in the runoff, the Mission did not observe the use of hate speech by any of the candidates or their agents.

IV- OBSERVATION OF THE VOTING PROCESS

10. The ECOWAS teams were deployed in all 12 regions of Benin. After careful evaluation of the information provided to the Situation Room by observers on the field and a debriefing session held with the observers upon their returning from the field, the Mission noted the following:

- (i) Voting generally commenced at 7:00 am and closed by 4pm. In the few places where voters were still on the queue at closing time, they were allowed to cast their votes as stipulated in the Electoral Act;
- (ii) A high sense of professionalism was demonstrated by polling officials;
- (iii) Delegates of the Constitutional Court were present in polling stations;
- (iv) There was order, discipline and a peaceful atmosphere all through the exercise;
- (v) Supplementary lists were used in a few polling stations;
- (vi) Voter turnout at the opening of the polls was relatively low but gradually improved;
- (vii) Priority and assistance was given to vulnerable people (the elderly, pregnant women, people with disabilities) in most of the polling stations visited;
- (viii) Domestic election observer groups (WANEP; MAEP; Civil Society Platform; the National Anti-Corruption Agency) and some International Observers, particularly OIF and GERDDES Afrique, observed the conduct of the polls;
- (ix) The decision of CENA authorising the use of the 2015 Voter's cards, and the National Identity cards for young adults, were respected;
- (x) A high-level of participation of women and youths;
- (xi) Vote counting proceeded smoothly, and in accordance with the Electoral laws;
- (xii) Security agents patrolled polling centres, as against being stationed at polling centres;
- (xiii) No major incident was observed at the polling stations by the observers.

V. ELECTORAL PROCESS

11. In respect of the foregoing, the ECOWAS Observation Mission to the runoff Presidential Election in the Republic of Benin reached the following provisional findings based on its observation and assessment of the electoral process, from the opening of the polls to vote counting in polling stations and collation centres on 20 March 2016.

12. The runoff Presidential Election on 20 March 2016 represents an important step in the consolidation and advancement of democracy in the Republic of Benin. The widely accommodating views and opinions expressed during the campaign, the atmosphere of camaraderie exhibited by the candidates and their supporters, before and during the polls, demonstrate the true commitment and determination of the citizens to advance the country's democratic gains, thus making it one of the few shining examples in the region and on the African continent.

13. Given the prevailing conducive environment, devoid of intimidation or any untoward skirmishes before and during the polls, the ECOWAS Observation Mission is of the view that, at this stage, the electoral process of the runoff presidential election was largely conducted under free, fair, transparent and acceptable conditions, and in line with international standards.

14. The ECOWAS Mission welcomes the efforts made by the Beninese authorities, the election management bodies, civil society organisations, and all stakeholders to ensure the smooth conduct of the elections in a peaceful climate. The Mission equally salutes the patience and the sense of civic duty displayed by voters on Election Day.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

15. The Mission will submit its recommendations to the relevant authorities, regarding various weaknesses, challenges and other initiatives which have been noted in both observations, in order to allow for concrete measures for the improvement in the organization and planning of future elections in the Republic of Benin.

16. In the meantime, the Mission encourages the voters to sustain their exemplary behaviour until the final announcement of the provisional results. It urges them to keep this high sense of responsibility and preserve the values of tolerance and peace which the Beninese people hold dearly.

17. In this regard, the Mission is pleased that even before the official announcement of the results, Mr. Lionel Zinsou, the candidate of the Republican Alliance congratulated Mr. Patrice TALON. This commendable act honors the Beninese people and indeed the whole of West Africa.

VII. CONCLUSION

18. The Election Observation Mission wishes to extend appreciation to the delegations of other Observation Missions, notably the AU, UEMOA, EU and the OIF for their joint collaboration and accompaniment in the entire process.

19. Lastly, with the support of the ECOWAS Zonal Bureau IV Office, the ECOWAS Observation Mission will continue to monitor the post-election developments until the final announcement of results and the swearing-in of the President-elect. The Mission expresses its sincere gratitude to the relevant authorities of the Republic of Benin for the steps taken to facilitate the deployment of observers for the election held on 20 March 2016.

Done at Cotonou, this 21 March 2016

H. E. Mr KABINE KOMARA
Head of Observer Mission