



MULTINATIONAL OBSERVER GROUP

Preliminary Statement

18 September 2014

In the view of the Multinational Observer Group:

- (a) the outcome of the 2014 Fijian Election is on track “to broadly represent the will of the Fijian voters”;**
- (b) the conditions were in place for Fijians to exercise their right to vote freely.**

The 2014 Fijian Election, the first election since 2006, was enthusiastically embraced by the voters of Fiji who were keen to participate in the democratic process. The election was conducted in an atmosphere of calm, with an absence of electoral misconduct or evident intimidation. The Fijian Elections Office and election workers were competent, professional and committed in performing their duties, sometimes under challenging circumstances. Despite compressed timeframes, a complex voting system and some restrictions in the electoral environment, the conditions were in place for Fijians to exercise their right to vote freely. This was a credible election. While counting is ongoing and the results are yet to be finalised, we assess that the outcome is on track to “broadly represent the will of the Fijian voters”¹. We congratulate the people of Fiji on taking this important step in their return to democracy.

Multinational Observer Group

The Multinational Observer Group (MOG), co-led by Australia, Indonesia and India, was invited by the Fijian Government to observe the 2014 Fijian Election. The MOG had freedom of movement around the country and was able to communicate freely with all stakeholders. Working in-country since 18 August, MOG observers met with government, election officials, political parties and candidates, media, civil society and faith-based organisations, community leaders, disciplined forces and voters. From 3-13 September, the MOG observed pre-polling in village communities, remote islands and at military bases.

On Election Day, 92 observers from 13 countries, the European Union and Melanesian Spearhead Group went to 455 polling stations (31 per cent of polling stations) and observed polling and counting across Fiji.

Electoral Environment

There was strong interest in contesting the election, with 248 candidates, from seven political parties and two independent candidates. Despite earlier restrictions on public meetings, political parties were able to mobilise and candidates were free to campaign. The campaign period was peaceful. However, civil society participation in the process was restricted.

The media in Fiji made good efforts to cover the election and political parties were, to varying degrees, able to communicate their messages to the public. However, the restrictive media framework, including potentially onerous penalties, limited the media's ability to examine rigorously the claims of candidates and parties.

Election Administration

Despite a new, unfamiliar and complex voting system, the Fijian Elections Office (FEO) administered the elections effectively. Police played an important role and also built confidence. Polling officials were well-prepared and voting procedures were generally followed correctly. FEO and the Electoral Commission ran an extensive voter information campaign which appeared to reach most voters. The counting process appeared well organised and thorough, both at polling stations and at the National Counting and Results Centre. The MOG has not observed any significant irregularities in the counting process. The MOG did, however, observe some problems, particularly in voter registration, pre-polling and postal voting, which stemmed at least in part from the short preparation time.

These and other matters will be the subject of more detailed comment when the final MOG report is completed in due course.

ⁱ MOG Terms of Reference Art 1(j)