



The Commonwealth

Interim Statement by
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Group (COG)

3 September 2025 | Georgetown, Guyana

INTRODUCTION

Good morning to you, the people of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, members of the diplomatic corps, fellow observers, members of the media, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you for joining us at this Commonwealth Observer Group Press Conference, where I will now present the interim assessment of the electoral process by the Commonwealth Observer Group.

The Commonwealth is honoured to have been invited by the Government of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana to observe these significant elections.

This is an interim statement that provides an initial assessment of our findings.

The final report of this Commonwealth Observer Group, with our full findings on the entire process and our recommendations, will be submitted to the Commonwealth Secretary-General in the coming months.

BACKGROUND

1. The Commonwealth Observer Group (the COG) was constituted by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Hon Shirley Botchwey, following an invitation from the Government of Guyana to observe the 2025 General and Regional Elections.
2. The Group notes the strong history of Commonwealth engagement with Guyana. This is the eighth consecutive election that the Commonwealth has been invited to observe in Guyana since 1992.
3. The Commonwealth has provided high-level Good Offices and technical support for elections over the years, including the deployment in 2020 and 2025 of two senior electoral experts, Dr Afari-Gyan, Former Chairperson of the Electoral Commission of Ghana, and Dr Zaidi, Former Chief Election Commissioner of India, to support the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM).



4. The Group's mandate is to offer an independent, informed, and impartial assessment of the entire electoral process; to consider the factors contributing to, or affecting the credibility of the electoral process; and to determine whether the elections have been conducted according to standards for democratic elections set out in the *Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation*, and in the *2018 Revised Guidelines on Commonwealth Election Observation* to which Commonwealth member countries are committed.
5. Our teams were deployed to seven electoral districts across Guyana: Regions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9 and 10.

Let me begin with the pre-election environment.

THE PRE-ELECTION ENVIRONMENT

6. **Stakeholder Meetings.** The Group met with the President, the Vice President, Ministers of Government, representatives of political parties, candidates, GECOM, the Police Force, the Ethnic Relations Commission, several government and private sector agencies, representatives of indigenous communities and of trade unions, the Commonwealth diplomatic community, representatives of international organisations, other election observation missions, the media, religious, women and youth organisations, academia and civil society.



- 7. The Context.** We were informed that elections are often marked by ethnic polarisation that contributes to a charged political atmosphere. The Group commends the calls made by the President, GECOM and leaders of other political parties in the days before the elections for peace and national unity and hopes that this message would continue to resonate in the post-election environment.
- 8.** We note that this election occurred in the context of significant GDP growth which has grown fivefold over the past five years to \$26bn (USD). This election also has seen the emergence of **new political parties** such as Assembly of Liberty and Prosperity (ALP), Forward Guyana Movement (FGM) and We Invest in Nationhood (WIN).
- 9. Appointments of Party Agents.** We commend GECOM for the approval of the appointment of Agents from the Alliance for Change (AFC), ALP, FGM and WIN political parties on 30 August, despite these parties missing the statutory timeline for the submission of those applications. This contributed to the integrity of the electoral process.
- 10. Perceptions of Fairness.** The fundamental rights of candidates, political parties, and their supporters to assemble and campaign appear to have been largely observed. We note with concern complaints from some of the newer parties on what they perceived as delays or refusal of permissions to hold rallies or travel to locations outside of Georgetown for campaign purposes.



- 11. Allegations of Intimidation.** The Group was made aware of allegations of intimidation of public sector workers, local business owners, members of civil society groups and community members, who reportedly feared losing employment or economic opportunities if they failed to demonstrate support for a particular party.
- 12. Election Legislation.** The Group applauds the Government's work on the harmonisation of legislation to update and clarify the legal framework for elections through the Representation of the People (Amendment) Act, Act 25 of 2022, and the National Registration (Amendment) Act, Act 26 of 2022.
- 13. Early Voting.** The Group applauds the peaceful and largely technically well managed conduct of the Disciplined Forces Voting that took place on 22 August. We recommend the consideration of extending this facility to other essential services workers.
- 14. Civil Society.** The Group found that the role of civil society- an important mechanism for transparency, accountability and democracy in Guyana- could be significantly strengthened.
- 15. The Media.** Coverage of the election was provided across television, radio and print media. However, there were concerns raised about the disproportionate coverage of the governing party by the state media. We recommend legislation to provide equitable access for all candidates and



political parties. We also note with concern that some members of the private media have reportedly self-censored for fear of victimisation.

16. Social Media. All political parties leveraged social media platforms. The Group was informed that the newer parties, at times with limited access to some traditional media, depended heavily on online campaigns. The Group recognises the democratising role of social media in disseminating information, but we note with concern that social media was used to spread misinformation and disinformation.

17. Dis/Misinformation. The Group heard that misinformation/disinformation, a challenge to democracy, was prevalent in the media and in public discourses during the campaign period. We recommend the establishment of an independent fact checking mechanism to support democratic strengthening in Guyana.

18. GECOM. The Group notes with concern reports of a significant trust deficit with GECOM and its impact on the perceived credibility of the conduct of the electoral process. Several stakeholders expressed concerns about the need for greater transparency in the electoral administration and the level of preparedness of GECOM.

18.1. Composition. The Group recommends a review of the legislation around the composition of GECOM; the present composition compromises its ability to effectively operate and



excludes important political stakeholders from deliberations and decision making.

18.2. The official list of electors (OLE). We note with concern the perceptions of mistrust by some in the OLE and the challenges in resolving its apparent inflated nature. We recommend that measures to address this, including for example, an enumeration exercise be undertaken. We note the absence of disaggregated data on the number of women, youth and persons with disabilities and recommend that this be collected and published.

18.3. Biometrics. We note that in response to complaints about the non-adoption of biometric verification technologies, which help verify voter identity, GECOM stated that it faced technical, legislative and administrative challenges and was unable to employ biometric verification for electors in these elections. We recommend that, early in the new election cycle, consideration be again given to the adoption of this technology.

18.3.1. Data. The 2022 Population and Housing Census data was not published. Some stakeholders suggested that the availability of this data may have contributed to improving perceptions of transparency in the electoral system.

18.4. Communication and the Media.

18.4.1. The Group is encouraged by the efforts by GECOM in the last few months to improve its communication, supported also by the UNDP and others, and recommends further strengthening its engagement with all stakeholders.

18.4.2. We recommend measures to foster greater inclusion and support for the smaller and newer parties to enable them to better participate in the electoral process.

18.4.3. We note the value of the adoption of media codes of conduct, as used in past elections, to encourage good practices by the media. We recommend a code of conduct be drafted in consultation with relevant media stakeholders. We further recommend that GECOM improves and has more regular interaction with the media.

18.5. **A GECOM Legal Adviser.** The Group noted that GECOM lacked the support of a substantive legal adviser in the months leading up to and on the election day, which some stakeholders said may have contributed to reduced public confidence in GECOM. We recommend that this post be filled as a matter of priority.

19. Implementation of Observer Recommendations. The Group noted with concern the very limited implementation of the recommendations of observer groups over the years. The Group encourages all political



stakeholders to give priority to the establishment of a robust post-electoral domestic mechanism that may in short order produce the legislative and constitutional reform needed for the conduct of credible, transparent and inclusive elections.

20. Campaign Financing. The Group was concerned about allegations of the use of state resources for campaigning. The Group also found that campaign financing rules are outdated and unenforced and recommends, the reform and regulation of campaign financing to promote fairness, transparency, and accountability.

21. Access to Information. We note with concern allegations of dissatisfaction with the lack of access to public information, including from the Office of the Commissioner of Information. We recommend the adequate resourcing and empowerment of a mechanism to efficiently respond to public information requests that will promote public transparency and accountability around elections.

THE ELECTION DAY

22. The Group noted a relatively peaceful atmosphere prior to election day.

23. Pre-Poll Procedures. We found that polling staff largely adhered to the stipulated pre-poll procedures, including showing empty ballot boxes to party agents and observers prior to the opening of the polls.



- 24. Opening and Conduct of Poll.** The general environment of the election day was peaceful, with polling generally opening on time. Though polling procedures were largely respected, in some cases there were minor inconsistencies in their application by polling staff.
- 25. Voting information and signage.** The Group commends GECOM for providing an information desk, materials and signage in and around polling stations, that generally were very effective in guiding voters. We recommend a greater consistency in the application of signage across all polling stations, including for example signage related to the identification of polling staff.
- 26. Public understanding of the electoral process.** We found that in general the public displayed a good understanding of the electoral process, and that the Presiding Officers clearly explained procedures as required.
- 27. GECOM Staff.** GECOM staff and polling staff were courteous and hospitable. They worked with professionalism, diligence and collegiality, also in managing cases of challenges with ballot reconciliation. The procedures for conducting the count ensured trust in the process. We observed that polling staff also were also afforded an opportunity to vote.
- 28. Party Agents.** Party Agents were present at polling stations to count and undersign the Statements of Poll with Polling Agents and Counting Agents. This practice is commended. We noted that the Party Agents



from at least three parties were present at most of the polling stations we observed.

29. Citizen and International Observers. Citizen and international observers were present at polling stations. We commend GECOM for encouraging the participation of citizen observers. We applaud the engagement of citizen observers in these elections and encourage a wider participation by civil society in future elections.

30. Secrecy of the Ballot. The prohibition of the use of mobile phones at polling booths was enforced. The position of polling tables generally guaranteed the secrecy of the ballot, except in some instances where the layout risked compromising the secrecy of the ballot.

31. Queue Management. We commend the management of voters by GECOM, there were varying lengths of queues at polling stations, but voters were patient, and largely tolerant of the time it took to process them.

32. Participation and Inclusion.

32.1. We commend the presence of two female presidential candidates and recognise that many parties have women and youth in their leadership. However, we were informed that cultural and financial barriers sometimes limit women's participation in leadership positions.



- 32.2. We commend the registration of at least one political candidate who is a person living with a disability.
- 32.3. We noted that women and youth were well-represented among both polling staff and voters.
- 32.4. We commend the practice that gave pregnant women, older persons and persons with disabilities priority in voting.
- 32.5. We note with concern, however, that many polling stations remained inaccessible to persons with disabilities (polling stations accessed by stairs, the absence of ramps, widened doorways, accessible washrooms, and designated disability parking spaces).
- 32.6. We also noted that blind voters did not have the option to vote independently with tactile ballot papers.
- 32.7. Although persons with disabilities have the option to cast a proxy vote, persons living with disabilities highlighted that the proxy vote deprives them of the secrecy of the ballot.
- 32.8. We encourage greater adherence to international good practice aligned with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. These emphasise the right to inclusive, accessible, and non-discriminatory electoral processes that uphold the dignity and independence of persons with disabilities.



33. Security. We commend the robust security arrangements. The Police employed the Joint Services Protocol to ensure that adequate resources were available to uphold law and order. The police, wearing body cameras, were present within the polling stations from opening of polls until all polling processes were completed, and generally their presence was not intimidating nor intrusive.

34. Close of Polls and Tabulation. Generally polling closed on time, allowing voters in the queue at 6:00 p.m. to cast their vote. We observed the counting of ballot papers. The new tabulation process for the Statements of Poll and District Tabulation Forms was followed and was well understood by party agents. The ascertainment of votes, results tabulation and verification were conducted with transparency and professionalism, and party agents were given copies of Statements of Poll. The Statements of Poll were uploaded to the GECOM website by the Returning Officers and the Group commends GECOM on these improvements from the 2020 elections, which can improve the accuracy and transparency of the results. While we applaud these significant improvements, we recommend the consideration of measures to further streamline the counting and tabulation process.



CONCLUSION AND POST-ELECTION PERIOD

35. Democracy. We congratulate the people of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for demonstrating their steadfast commitment to democracy and for participating in an orderly manner in the exercise of their franchise. We commend GECOM, the polling staff, political parties, the police, and the media for their respective roles in the conduct of these elections.

36. The Results. We commend the work undertaken thus far. We encourage GECOM to continue to manage the tabulation and to conduct the announcement of the results with diligence and transparency.

37. Peace. We trust that the peaceful tenor of the electoral process thus far will continue as we await official results. We call on all political parties to continue to encourage their candidates, supporters and other stakeholders to work for national unity, peace and solidarity. We urge all parties, should any elections disputes arise, to follow the prescribed legal channels for their resolution.

38. Implementation of Observer Recommendations: We encourage all political stakeholders to exercise diligence in creating appropriate and inclusive domestic mechanisms to review and implement the recommendations of observers, to further strengthen democracy in Guyana. We also encourage all relevant stakeholders to contribute to these processes.



39. The Commonwealth Family. The Commonwealth is committed to accompanying Guyana's democratic strengthening. Democracy, in all nations, is a journey, and we encourage the broader Commonwealth family and international partners to continue to walk with this great nation as it charts a prosperous and inclusive future for all its citizens.

40. Thank You. Guyana is a wonderfully diverse and incredible country, with beautiful people and it was an honour for me and for my fellow Commonwealth Observers to serve on this mission. I would like to take this opportunity, to once again thank the people of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for the access offered for our observation and for the warm hospitality and support accorded to me and to my fellow Observers during our stay.

I thank you once again.

Issued on 3 September 2025

Georgetown

NOTE TO EDITORS:

The Commonwealth provided Good Offices and technical support through successive election cycles to Guyana, including the following:

- 2002 and 2006 - supporting the Guyana constitutional reform project from 2002 to 2006 under the auspices of the late Sir Paul Reeves as Commonwealth Special Envoy.
- 2006 - supporting GECOM's mandate to administer peaceful and credible elections through assistance in the drafting of a media code of conduct.
- 2006 - by providing a resident senior electoral technical advice for the 2006 General Election.
- 2011- by providing technical support to the Elections Commission during the preparations for the 2011 election, including the training of staff and the deployment of technical experts.
- 2015 - by providing technical support to the media monitoring unit in 2015.
- 2020 and 2025 - by providing senior electoral experts to support GECOM for the 2020 elections. The same experts were redeployed by the

Commonwealth Secretary-General to support GECOM for the 2025 elections.

- Our teams were deployed to seven electoral districts across Guyana: Regions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9 and 10: Pomeroon/Supenaam; Essequibo Islands/West Demerara; Demerara/Mahaica, Mahaica/Berbice; East Berbice/Corentyne, Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo, and Upper Demerara/Berbice.