

PAPUA NEW GUINEA NATIONAL ELECTION
ARRIVAL STATEMENT
HIS EXCELLENCY BARON WAQA
FORMER PRESIDENT OF NAURU
CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMONWEALTH OBSERVER GROUP

The invitation by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, The Rt. Hon. Patricia Scotland QC, to chair the Commonwealth Observer Group (COG) for Papua New Guinea's National Election as a fellow Pacifika, is a considerable honour. The Group was constituted at the invitation of the Papua New Guinea Electoral Commission, and I am joined by eight other eminent persons drawn from the Commonwealth for the elections due to be held from 2 July to 22 July.

This COG follows a pre-election assessment mission to Papua New Guinea in March 2022. The Group brings together a wealth of experience from across the social and political spectrum including civil society, media, electoral management, and political space. We are here to observe the electoral process as requested and will act impartially and independently as we assess its organisation and conduct.

We recognise the significance of these elections to the people of Papua New Guinea, the region and the global community and appreciate the challenges they present as the world continues to battle the Coronavirus pandemic. The pandemic isn't over, and we urge all stakeholders to abide by all COVID-19 protocols of Papua New Guinea.

Our mandate is to observe and evaluate the pre-election environment, the elections on various polling days and the post-election period against the backdrop of Papua New Guinea's national legislation and regulations, as well as regional and international commitments. We will then report on whether the elections have been conducted to the standards to which Papua New Guinea has committed itself, including its own laws. We look forward to a peaceful election and urge stakeholders, including voters, to commit to a peaceful election, consistent with Commonwealth's values and principles.

Our planned briefings, which began yesterday, are wide-ranging, encompassing election officials, political parties, the media, citizen observers, women's groups, and the youth.

From Sunday 3 July, our observers will be deployed to locations across the country. They will be in small teams and will arrive to observe preparations ahead of the polling period. They will also meet with political parties, the police, election officials and other stakeholders in their respective locations.

Over the 21-day polling period, they will observe the opening, voting, closing, counting and the results management processes. We will issue an interim statement on our preliminary findings on 24 July 2022. A final report will then be prepared and submitted to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, and subsequently shared with relevant stakeholders and the public.

The Commonwealth's support to Papua New Guinea and its democratic processes is evidenced by our presence here, which serves as confirmation of our commitment, hope and solidarity with the people of Papua New Guinea.

My fellow observers and I would like to acknowledge our shared history as people of the Pacific family. We thank the people of Papua New Guinea for giving us an opportunity to work with them on this historical process. We are sending our best wishes and prayers as you cast your votes.

The Group will depart Papua New Guinea by 31 July 2022.