



ARRIVAL STATEMENT BY THE CHAIR OF THE COMMONWEALTH OBSERVER GROUP TO THE GAMBIA PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

**Statement by HE Olusegun Obasanjo
Former President of Nigeria
Banjul, 27 November 2021**

Following an invitation from the Chairperson of the Independent Electoral Commission of The Gambia, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC, has constituted a Commonwealth Observer Group for the Presidential Election, scheduled for 4 December 2021. It is my honour and privilege to have been asked to lead the Group, and to be here in the country for these elections.

Our nine-member Observer Group has been drawn from across the Commonwealth and brings together a diversity of experience, with experts in the fields of elections, law, civil society, politics, human rights and conflict resolution. The Group is supported by a staff team of seven led by Linford Andrews, Head of the Electoral Support Section at the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Whilst the Commonwealth has a long history of observing elections in The Gambia, this is the first observer mission to the country since its return to the Commonwealth in 2018.

Our observers have arrived in Banjul and will soon commence their stakeholder briefings. We recognise the significance of this presidential election to the people of The Gambia, and the historical context in which this contest is taking place. We also recognise the particular

challenges posed by the ongoing pandemic, both in terms of campaigning and election administration.

Our mandate, as set out in the Commonwealth's 'Revised Guidelines' for election observation, is to observe and evaluate the pre-election environment, polling day activities and the post-election period. We will consider whether conditions exist for a credible, transparent and inclusive election., including whether there is a level playing field for candidates; whether public media has been impartial; whether the administration of the electoral process has been transparent; and whether the rule of law has been adhered to.

Following the election, our Group will issue a report. As well as addressing the above matters, the report will assess whether the election was conducted in accordance with the standards to which The Gambia has committed itself, including its own laws and regulations, as well as the country's regional and international commitments. Our report will also consider whether the laws and regulations are in concert with these international commitments, and whether policies and procedures are in keeping with international good practice.

The report will make a number of recommendations on various aspects of the electoral process. Importantly, in the post-election period, the Commonwealth Secretariat will, upon receiving formal requests from national stakeholders, seek to provide assistance on the implementation of these recommendations.

In conducting our duties and undertaking our assessment, we will be neutral, impartial, objective and independent. In accordance with the provisions of the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, to which the Commonwealth Secretariat is a signatory organisation, the Group has no executive role; its function is not to supervise but to observe the process as a whole and to give recommendations accordingly. We are here in our individual capacities as eminent and experienced Commonwealth citizens. The assessment by the Group will be its own and not that of any member government.

Over the coming days we will be meeting numerous stakeholders, including political parties, the police, civil society groups, citizen observer and monitor groups, and the media. From 2 December we will deploy our observers in small teams to each of the six regions to observe electoral preparations and meet with local stakeholders in their respective locations.

On Election Day, our Group will observe the opening, voting, closing, counting and the results management processes. We will issue an interim statement on our preliminary findings on 6 December 2021, and the Group will depart The Gambia by 10 December 2021. Our final report will then be prepared and submitted to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, and subsequently shared with relevant stakeholders and the public.

Our presence here reaffirms the solidarity and support of the Commonwealth to The Gambia and its democratic processes.

On behalf of the Commonwealth Observer Group, I wish the people of The Gambia well as they embark upon this election. We encourage all Gambians to do their part to ensure that a peaceful, credible, transparent and inclusive process takes place on 4 December.

ENDS.

Full composition of the Commonwealth Observer Group:

- **H E Olusegun Obasanjo**, Former President of Nigeria, (Chairperson)
- **Prosper Bani**, Former Minister of Interior, Ghana
- **The Hon Martha Karua**, Former Minister of Justice, Kenya
- **Robert Phiri**, Executive Director, Public Affairs Commission, Malawi
- **Hendrick Gappy**, Former Chairperson, Electoral Commission, Seychelles
- **Shyamala Gomez**, Executive Director, Centre for Equality and Justice, Sri Lanka
- **Candia Dames**, Executive Editor of the Nassau Guardian, The Bahamas
- **Crispin Kaheru**, Commissioner, Uganda Human Rights Commission, Uganda

- **Musa Mwenye**, SC Former Attorney General, Zambia
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For media enquiries, please contact:

Temitope Kalejaiye

Communications Officer

t.kalejaiye@commonwealth.int