

**ARRIVAL STATEMENT
BY ZAINAB HAWA BANGURA, CHAIR OF THE
COMMONWEALTH OBSERVER GROUP TO THE
2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN THE COMMONWEALTH OF DOMINICA**

*1 December 2019
Roseau, Dominica*

Statement by: Chair of the Commonwealth Observer Group, Zainab Hawa Bangura, former Minister of Foreign and International Affairs of Sierra Leone; and former Under-Secretary-General at the United Nations.

I am honoured to have been asked by Commonwealth Secretary-General, The Rt Honourable Patricia Scotland QC, to Chair the Commonwealth Observer Group to the 6 December 2019 General Elections in the Commonwealth of Dominica.

This Group was constituted following an invitation extended by the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Dominica to send a Commonwealth Observer Group and comprises of eminent persons drawn from across the different regions of the Commonwealth, including the Caribbean, Africa, Asia and Europe. They bring a wealth of experience from across the social and political spectrum including political representation, electoral administration, rule of law and justice, civil society, media, security as well as women's and youth matters.

Our presence in Dominica affirms the support of the Commonwealth to Dominica and its democratic processes.

We arrived in Dominica on 27 November 2019 and will be in the country until 13 December 2019. The Group expresses sincere gratitude for the warm welcome we have received, the hospitality shown to us, and the readiness of the different stakeholders to meet with us and assist as we undertake our task to observe the elections.

Election observation is a core role of our 53-member country Commonwealth and its 2.4 billion people.

The Group's assessment will be its own and not that of any other individual, institution or country.

We make a commitment that our observation role will be undertaken with impartiality, independence and transparency; and, in accordance with the *Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation* and the *Revised Commonwealth Guidelines for the Observation of Elections in Member Countries* which was agreed by Commonwealth Heads of Governments in 2018.

The task of the Group is to consider all the factors, to our knowledge, that would impact the credibility of the electoral process as a whole.

The Group will assess the pre-election environment, polling day activities and the post-election period and consider whether the elections have been conducted according to the standards for democratic elections to which Dominica has committed itself, with reference to its own election-related legislation as well as relevant regional, Commonwealth and other international commitments the country has taken upon itself.

In this context, we look forward to all political candidates reaffirming their commitment to peaceful elections.

Our planned briefings are wide ranging, encompassing the Electoral Commission, political leaders, political parties and other local stakeholders including representatives from civil society.

Thus far, the Group have already met with electoral officials, observed training sessions for Election Day workers, rallies of both political parties, and will observe related court proceedings.

On 5 December, members of the Group will deploy from Roseau to various constituencies to observe preparations ahead of polling day. On Election Day, we will observe opening, voting, closing, counting and the results management process.

We will issue an interim statement on our preliminary findings shortly after the elections. A final and more detailed report will be prepared as soon as practically possible. It will be submitted to the Secretary-General, and subsequently shared with relevant stakeholders and the public.

And, on behalf of the Group, I wish all Dominicans well as they prepare to go out on Friday 6 December 2019 to exercise their franchise.

Note to Editors:

The Commonwealth Observer Group will function impartially and independently and will conduct itself according to the standards expressed in the International Declaration of Principles for Election Observation.

The Group is supported by a staff team of five persons from the Commonwealth Secretariat, led by Dr Tres-Ann Kremer, Head of Good Offices for Peace and Adviser for the Caribbean.

The Commonwealth is a voluntary association of 53 independent and equal sovereign states. It is home to 2.4 billion citizens, of whom 60 per cent are under the age of 30. The Commonwealth includes some of the world's largest, smallest, richest and poorest countries, spanning five regions. 31 of its members are small states, many of them island nations. Commonwealth countries are supported by an active network of more than 80 intergovernmental, civil societies, cultural and professional organisations.

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