

## **Arrival Statement**

### **Sir Anand Satyanand, Chair Commonwealth Observer Group Papua New Guinea National Elections 2017**

I am honoured to take my place in Papua New Guinea as Chair of the Commonwealth Observer Group to the 2017 National Elections.

The Commonwealth Secretary-General, Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC, constituted a 12-member Observer Group, following an invitation early this year from the Government of Papua New Guinea. The Group is supported by a six-member staff team.

Members of our Group were appointed by the Secretary General from across the Commonwealth. They include experts from political, election, development, media, youth and gender fields. Our Terms of Reference are to observe the electoral process and consider the factors that could impinge on the credibility of the electoral process as a whole. This includes observing the pre-election environment, polling day, the count, and post election period.

In individual preparation for this assignment, I visited Papua New Guinea from 23 – 25 May 2017 with a senior political adviser from the Commonwealth Secretariat. I met a great many people including the Prime Minister and other senior officials in government, the Electoral Commissioner, the Registrar of Political Parties, representatives of political parties, and some of the Government's development partners and other stakeholders.

Two members of our Group have been on the ground as advance observers since 7 June in Port Moresby, Lae, Goroka and Mt Hagen.

The Commonwealth has been working in recent years with PNG's Electoral Commission and has observed four of the last five national elections since 1992. Our presence here reaffirms the Commonwealth's strong and long-standing support for Papua New Guinea's democratic processes.

We will also consider whether the elections have been conducted according to the standards for democratic elections to which Papua New Guinea has committed itself, with reference to national election-related legislation as well as relevant Commonwealth, regional and other international norms and commitments.

We are committed to being objective, independent and impartial. The

assessment of the Group will be its own, and not that of any member government or organisation. We will also make recommendations to assist the conduct of future elections.

We are meeting a wide range of stakeholders, including the Papua New Guinea Electoral Commission, Political Parties and Candidates Integrity Commission, representatives of political parties, civil society and the international community. Our Observers will travel to four regions of the country to observe the voting, counting and results processes. We will have a visible Commonwealth presence with the other international and national observer groups to share information and coordinate our efforts.

The Commonwealth Charter recognises ‘the inalienable right of individuals to participate in democratic processes, in particular through free and fair elections in shaping the society in which they live. Governments, political parties and civil society are responsible for upholding and promoting democratic culture and practices and are accountable to the public in this regard. Parliament and representative local government and other forms of local governance are essential elements in the exercise of democratic governance.’

The Commonwealth in this regard thus encourages and supports its member countries to conduct credible and peaceful elections as a means of giving the citizens an opportunity to choose their leaders and to hold them accountable.

We acknowledge and commend the theme for these 2017 elections as declared by the Electoral Commissioner: “Your Choice – Protect our Democracy”. We call on all political parties and citizens to play their roles responsibly, in order to ensure a peaceful and successful election.

On behalf of the Commonwealth Observer Group, I wish the people of Papua New Guinea well for the 2017 elections.

Port Moresby, 21 June 2017