

## **Progress in Improving Electoral Environment Thanks to Collective Effort of Haitians**

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For Immediate Release*

ParlAmericas, an independent network of national legislatures of 35 countries in the Americas, has been undertaking an electoral observation mission and offers *preliminary* observations on the conduct of the October 25 vote for the national assembly, local government leadership and the first round of the Presidential elections.

While noting signs of improvement in the process and the conduct of electoral stakeholders, the Mission encourages further steps to develop a more transparent, peaceful and inclusive electoral process.

The main preliminary observations of the ParlAmericas Mission are:

- MiOÉH observers witnessed an election day that was generally peaceful in nature. The Conseil Électoral Provisoire (CÉP), political parties, security forces, civil society and the media should build on this achievement and work towards further measures to improve understanding of procedures to instill more confidence in the process.
- The Mission also noted that in the majority of polling stations visited, representatives of political parties (Mandataires) did not disrupt the process. However further steps can be taken to ease congestion and more can be done to better prepare these individuals to carry out their duties more effectively.
- The Mission applauds the work of thousands of Haitian civil society members at all levels of the country especially in promoting voter education and inclusive participation. They have demonstrated their commitment to the democratic process.
- The Mission notes that increased numbers of Haitian women were active in the work of the CÉP, civil society and in political parties, and that these elections will result in at least 1/3 of women being elected to local government positions. But the Mission underlines that significant challenges remain for Haiti's electoral process to become more inclusive and safe, especially for elected positions at the national level.

The MiOÉH aims to promote transparency, non-violence and respect for Haitian laws, as well as regional and international commitments. It consists of six electoral professionals supported by a talented national staff and 12 long term observers (LTOs) deployed throughout the country since September. Since that time, they have met with candidates, representatives of political parties, local governments, members of municipal and departmental electoral offices, national and local media and members of civil society including women's associations.

On October 22, MiOÉH was joined by 28 Short Term Observers (STOs) enabling 20 teams of two observers each to carry out a systematic observation in over 175 polling stations touching each department of the country. The Short Term Observation delegation included Member of the National Assembly of Ecuador, Gina Godoy, President of the Group of Women Parliamentarians of ParlAmericas, and 10 former Canadian elected officials from a variety of political parties including the Honourable Jean Pierre Blackburn, Former Ambassador and Former Minister in the Canadian government.

On election day, MiOÉH observers noted some delays in the opening of polling stations, however, in almost all cases where our observers were present, voting began by 7:00 am. Observers reported presence of security forces outside polling stations and enhanced security inspections of authorized persons who entered the polling stations.

Observers indicated that polling workers demonstrated a commitment to follow procedures, but did not always appear confident in performing their tasks. In addition, MiOÉH observers noted that although mandataires were generally not disruptive, they did not demonstrate a familiarity with the procedures that would enable them to effectively assess the process. In some cases, uncertainty over the rules raised tensions, although observers noted that in most cases Supervisors demonstrated a good knowledge of the process and were able to rectify problems.

The Mission believes the efficiency of polling stations would improve if more structured training and improved teaching materials were provided and simpler procedural documentation were made available at each polling station. Although the CÉP would need to play a leading role in this, the political parties would also need to do more to train their party agents. In the majority of polling stations observers reported significant congestion. This can slow down the voting process and could be a safety hazard. In the event of an increase in voter turnout, overcrowding can easily occur making it difficult to maintain an orderly process. Recognizing that Haiti continues to experience significant infrastructure challenges and adequate secure premises are not always readily available, it will be important for election officials to take steps to enlarge the area of polling stations and review their setup.

MiOÉH observers took note of concerns by mandataires and national observers regarding potential problems with the secrecy of the vote, due to the design and placement of the voting screens, especially when more than one voter was using it or if it was placed too close to poll workers or other individuals authorized to be in the polling stations.

Observers returned to the same polling station where they had observed the opening process to witness the closing and counting. In the majority of cases the station closed on time and the conducive atmosphere noted at the opening was maintained.

MiOÉH was impressed with the commitment expressed by civil society to educate and motivate citizens to engage in the electoral process in all parts of the country during the pre-election period. MiOÉH wishes to recognize the increasing sophistication by non-partisan organizations in undertaking systematic observation of the electoral process. The Mission was pleased to note that 14 national civil society organizations were accredited by the CÉP to observe elections and

we look forward to reviewing their reports and perspectives. For election day, l'Observatoire Citoyen pour l'Institutionnalisation de la Démocratie (OCID) trained and deployed 1700 observers across the country in order to undertake an objective assessment of the process. This can be useful in not only assessing the quality of the process, but deterring fraud, increasing confidence in the process and also in identifying needed improvements.

The CÉP implemented important measures to support an increased level of participation by women in these October 25 elections, with observers reporting good representation of women working in BVs and CVs observed. While the turn-out of women as voters cannot be quantitatively verified by the Mission, observers reported women were participating. Gender disaggregated data from OCID is encouraged as an important contribution to enhance understanding of women's participation as electors.

The gender quota was applied, which will result in women in elected office for at least 1/3 local level positions part of this October 25 election. The Mission applauds the women who sought nomination and engaged as candidates in this electoral process. The decrease in the number of women who will be elected to Parliament, however, is troubling. This can only be overcome with political leadership to eliminate intimidation and political violence and to promote proactive measures that reduce economic and political marginalization.

The Mission welcomes the start of the Centre Tabulation de Vote (CTV) activities according to schedule. The CTV is operational and MiOÉH is observing the different stages of the tabulation process. Moreover, we noted that the scanning of the protocols of the polling stations (Procès-Verbaux or PVs) is now performed upon receipt instead of when archiving. This measure enables the verification of the minutes received at the CTV against those tabulated.

The Mission encourages the posting of images of PVs received and entered on the CTV website as soon as possible. Moreover, it would be useful for the CTV to issue periodic progress reports on their website to inform the public about the progress of the receipt and processing of PVs.

As the important tabulation process continues, the Mission calls upon political parties to continue to remain calm and exercise their right to observe the CTV process. It also encourages the CÉP to share information about the CTV process for greater transparency and better public understanding.

ParlAmericas wishes to thank the Government of Haiti and the CÉP for the invitation to freely observe the elections and is encouraged by the willingness of a broad cross section of electoral stakeholders to engage with Mission observers and analysts to share their views and suggestions. The Mission will issue a final report with recommendations for all stakeholders at the end of the electoral process after the vote scheduled in December and carry out consultations with relevant stakeholders, including parliament, political parties and civil society.

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