



## **Preliminary Findings**

### **Election Observation on the Joint Election in the Solomon Islands**

*Friday, 19 April 2024*

#### **1) Introduction**

Following the establishment of the Group of Seven Plus (g7+) Election Observation Mission (EOM) as part of peer learning and sharing of experience under its flagship program ‘**Fragile-to-Fragile cooperation**’ on 22 March, 2023 in Freetown, Sierra Leone, the g7+ has conducted election observation mission in four member states, namely; Timor-Leste (21 May 2023), Guinea Bissau (4 June 2023), Sierra Leone (24 June 2023) and Liberia (10 October 2023).

Election is one of the most important phases in the trajectory of our member countries. They are milestones that determine chances of democracy, stability and peace. In line with the vision of the g7+, member countries have inspired lessons to share and learn from each other on peace-building and state-building.

As an Inter-Governmental organization, the g7+ brings together fragile and conflict affected countries including Solomon Islands with the aim to achieve peace and stability through peer learning. This mission is aimed at contributing to three important objectives, as follows:

- Promote peer learning and share of experiences in managing elections;
- Contribute to enhance democratic consolidation, strengthening peace and development
- Improve Electoral Commission operations through recommendations

The g7+ Election Observation Mission comprises of members accredited by Solomon Islands Electoral Commission (SIEC) to observe the Joint Election in Solomon Islands on 17 April 2024. The mission took place from 13 to 20 April 2024. The members of the mission are as follows:

1. Dr. Simon Sinai, Electoral Commissioner of Papua New Guinea, Head of Delegation
2. Dr. Helder da Costa, General Secretary of g7+
3. Dr. Felix Piedade, Chief Operating Officer of g7+
4. Mr. Agostinho da Cunha, National Director, Technical Secretariat for Electoral Administration in Timor-Leste
5. Mrs. Helche Silvester, Media and Communication Manager of g7+
6. Mr. Agostinho Tavares, Policy Assistant of g7+
7. Mr. Anito Soares, Tatoli Media, Timor-Leste

During its mission, the delegation paid a courtesy visit to the CEO of the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission, Mr. Jasper Highwood Anisi and his Deputy, Mrs. Christina Mitini to thank them for all of the support to the g7+ team and to have an overview on election procedures in the country.

The delegation was divided into three teams and observed a total of 45 polling stations at the two provinces, the Capital City of Honiara, covered three constituencies: East Honiara, Central Honiara and West Honiara while at Guadalcanal, covered three constituencies: North West of Guadalcanal, Central Guadalcanal and North Guadalcanal (*See annex 1 for the detail of polling stations that the g7+ team observed during the election*). A checklist form was utilized to observe the electoral process, starting from the opening, polling and closure.

The team observed the electoral process from a ***perspective of impartiality, independence, professionalism and objectivity*** which are in line with international best practices and follow the electoral rules and regulation that stipulated in the Solomon Islands, including to Code of Conduct for Observers.

The Solomon Islands Electoral Commission (SIEC) reported that a total of 420,253 registered voters (51,48% of men and 48,52% of women) to participate in this joint election. These voters are divided into 1,106 polling stations and assisted by 5,530 polling staff across the country.

## 2) Election Observation

- Given the fact that this is the first joint election ever conducted in the country, the g7+ team congratulates the people, for casting their votes, which contributes to the peaceful election in the Solomon Islands. This shows that the country is moving towards the right path to resilience.
- The g7+ team commends the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission (SIEC) for successfully conducting this Joint Election, which marks an important milestone for the improvement of the Solomon Islands electoral management body.
- The election was in general conducted at an atmosphere of **free, peaceful and transparent** manner.
- This report covers observation of two important events, namely: (1) Campaign Activities, and (2) Election Day

### *2.1. Campaign Activities*

- The g7+ EOM observed the last two days of campaigning by candidates in the city of Honiara on 14 and 15 April 2024. It was surprising to see the rally from various parties and candidates through main road without any major reports of inappropriate behavior, or disturbances toward the other parties or individual candidate's supporters.
- The team admired the enthusiasm and passive movement of supporters who have demonstrated through their acts during the political rally. This is a clear demonstration of the political maturity of the people of the Solomon Islands with respect to political opponents and political tolerance. This lesson will certainly be shared with other g7+ member states.
- The unlimited campaign hours, which allow some activities continue until midnight shows maturity and tolerance of the Solomon Islands people.
- The removal of campaign materials and slogans in public places during the black out period, one day before the election day is noticeable.

### *2.2. Elections Day*

#### *2.2.1. Opening of polls*

- Most of polling stations opened on time at 7am according to what is prescribed at the election law, the only exception of only two polling stations observed (*Don Bosco 1 and Don Bosco 2 at Central Guadalcanal*), which were delayed approximately of 15-30 minutes late.
- Majority of polling stations were conducive and had proper lay out.

- All sensitive materials and polling staff were ready at the polling station before the opening hour.
- One polling station, namely, *Titige* at North West Guadalcanal was commenced with saying Grace to God, which the team found as a good practice.
- Polling Staff were knowledgeable on opening procedures and demonstrated their act in a transparent manner, including in the seal of the ballot box, however, not all Presiding Officers announced the seal numbers.
- The ballot boxes were sealed in the presence of the polling agents, police officer and observers and invited to note the seal numbers, however, similar procedure did not happen in a few polling stations.
- Some polling stations have no clear directive signage at the polling lay out.
- It is encouraging to see that there was no heavy police presence in the polling station which implies that the environment is safe and secure.
- During the opening, the team observed the presence of polling agents from various candidates in addition to national and international observers at the polling station.

### 2.2.2. *Polling Process*

- Queues at polling station observed were largely peaceful and calm, despite raining during the day, however, it did not discourage voters to vote.
- The Presiding Officers were very approachable, cooperative, helpful and responsive to questions by observers.
- Polling staff performed their role in a professional and impartial manner, however, there were some different practices in various polling station. For example, some of ballot boxes had no information written for name of polling station and polling station number.
- The verification of voter identification took time in some of the polling stations. In one of the polling stations observed (*King George VI School, Polling station 5, East Honiara*), the queue controller took initiative to inform the voters, to check their name in the checklist and write it on a piece of paper with corresponding page to match with the verification list. This helps to speed up the voter's verification process, which is a good practice in time management.
- It was noticed that some of the polling staff were not able to exercise their right to vote because they are posted in different location of their voting area.
- The team observed that not all voters were knowledgeable about the voting process and assisted by Polling Staff for voting.

- The team noticed there was a good gender balance between polling staff at most of the polling stations, which is commendable. Some polling stations had women as the Presiding Officer, in others, dominated by female polling staff.
- Assistant to voters with special needs (elderly and people with disability), including pregnant women and women carrying babies was given priority to vote.
- Voting screens position in some of the polling station (small and close to each other), did not ensure the secrecy of the ballot.
- Most of polling stations observed, a place is provided for polling agents to observe the whole process and the presence of both national and international observers and some media.
- The team identified some polling agent did not have visible ID from SIEC.

### 2.2.3. Closure of Polling Station

- The polling station observed, closed on time at 4 pm and no voters on the queue.
- Presiding Officer announced the last seal number before close the ballot boxes and requested one of the polling agents to sign the form as witness.
- Polling staff conducted the reconciliation process in a professional and transparent manner in the presence of polling agent and observers before transported to Counting Centers.
- Polling Station voter turnout was posted outside of the polling station.

This report does not cover the counting process since it is still in progress at the time of preparation of this report.

### 3) Recommendations

The primary objective of the mission is to improve Election Management Bodies including the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission (SIEC) through the following recommendations:

1. Similar to other g7+ countries, not all voters are knowledgeable about the election process, therefore, it is important to *invest more in civic education* in the spirit of promoting democracy, strengthening institutions and build peaceful societies.
2. There is a need for continued efforts in increasing the skills and knowledge through *capacity building* to ensure good practices, and consistency in managing the election activities.

3. Following experiences from most of g7+ member countries in voter verification, it is recommended to *have a clear directive for voters* of the polling teams that are voting in alphabetical arrangement.
4. It is important to be *consistent between checklist of voters with the verification list* at the polling station to ensure the smooth process of the voting.
5. There should be a *standard procedure* to protect the secrecy of the voting by providing a sizeable and secured location of the voting screen.
6. It is recommended that the *recruitment of polling staff* should be posted in the area that they can exercise their right to vote.

#### 4) Conclusion

- The team observed that the Joint Election in Solomon Islands, in general was **free, peaceful and transparent**.
- The g7+ Election Observation Mission reiterates that this is an initial assessment of the electoral process for the Joint Election in Solomon Islands and therefore solicits the continuous cooperation from all parties and state actors in the Solomon Islands.
- The g7+ will continue to promote its program of '*Fragile-to-Fragile Cooperation*', provides a platform for member countries including the Solomon Islands to learn from other countries experiences.
- The g7+ team looks forward for continued collaboration in the future as part of strengthening state institutions and promoting democracy, peace and development in our country.
- The g7+ team would like to reiterate its gratitude to the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission for the opportunity to observe the joint election, and wish the above recommendations are considered for future improvement.

## Annex 1: List of Polling Station, Observed by the g7+ Team

### Summary:

Observed of total 45 Polling Stations

- 21 at Honiara City Council (14 at Central Honiara, 2 at West Honiara and 5 at East Honiara)
- 24 at Guadalcanal Province (7 at North West Guadalcanal, 7 at Central Guadalcanal and 10 North Guadalcanal)

No.	Province	Constituencies	Ward	Name of Polling Station
1.	Honiara	Central Honiara	Kola'a	Multi-purpose Premises
2.	Honiara	Central Honiara	Vuhokesa	United Church
3.	Honiara	Central Honiara	Vuhokesa	Ssec Central Church
4.	Honiara	Central Honiara	Cruz	National Museum 2
5.	Honiara	Central Honiara	Cruz	National Museum 1
6.	Honiara	Central Honiara	Cruz	Girl Guide Hut
7.	Honiara	Central Honiara	Cruz	National Archives
8.	Honiara	Central Honiara	Kola'a	St. Barnabas Hall
9.	Honiara	Central Honiara	Kola'a	Kolo'ale School 1
10.	Honiara	Central Honiara	Kola'a	Kolo'ale School 2
11.	Honiara	Central Honiara	Vuhokesa	United Church 1
12.	Honiara	Central Honiara	Matanko	Honiara High School 3
13.	Honiara	Central Honiara	Matanko	Honiara High School 2
14.	Honiara	Central Honiara	Matanko	Honiara High School 1
15.	Honiara	West Honiara	Rovel Lengkika	St. John School 1
16.	Honiara	West Honiara	Rovel Lengkika	St. John School 2
17.	Honiara	East Honiara	Panatina	Kg Vi School 1
18.	Honiara	East Honiara	Panatina	Kg Vi School 2
19.	Honiara	East Honiara	Panatina	Kg Vi School 3
20.	Honiara	East Honiara	Panatina	Kg Vi School 6
21.	Honiara	East Honiara	Panatina	Kg Vi School 5
22.	Guadalcanal	North West Guadalcanal	Tandai	Titige
23.	Guadalcanal	North West Guadalcanal	Tandai	Gilbert Camp
24.	Guadalcanal	North West Guadalcanal	Tandai	Barana
25.	Guadalcanal	North West Guadalcanal	Tandai	L.d.a Mamara
26.	Guadalcanal	North West Guadalcanal	Tandai	Tamboko
27.	Guadalcanal	North West Guadalcanal	Tandai	Vura Clinic
28.	Guadalcanal	North West Guadalcanal	Tandai	Vatukola 2

29.	Guadalcanal	Central Guadalcanal	Malango	Don Bosco 2
30.	Guadalcanal	Central Guadalcanal	Malango	Lunga Primary School 1
31.	Guadalcanal	Central Guadalcanal	Malango	St. Joseph Tenaru 2
32.	Guadalcanal	Central Guadalcanal	Malango	Don Bosco 1
33.	Guadalcanal	Central Guadalcanal	Malango	Lunga Primary School 2
34.	Guadalcanal	Central Guadalcanal	Malango	St. Joseph Tenaru 1
35.	Guadalcanal	Central Guadalcanal	Malango	Belaha Relocation Center
36.	Guadalcanal	North Guadalcanal	Ghaobata	Tutuva
37.	Guadalcanal	North Guadalcanal	Ghaobata	Ngalibiu 3
38.	Guadalcanal	North Guadalcanal	Ghaobata	Ngalibiu 4
39.	Guadalcanal	North Guadalcanal	Ghaobata	Nguvia 2
40.	Guadalcanal	North Guadalcanal	Ghaobata	Nguvia 3
41.	Guadalcanal	North Guadalcanal	Ghaobata	Tumorora 1
42.	Guadalcanal	North Guadalcanal	Ghaobata	Ngalibiu 1
43.	Guadalcanal	North Guadalcanal	Ghaobata	Ngalibiu 2
44.	Guadalcanal	North Guadalcanal	Ghaobata	Nguvia 1
45.	Guadalcanal	North Guadalcanal	Ghaobata	Tumorora 1



### The g7+ Election Observation Mission team members

No	Name	Position	Signature
1.	Dr. Simon Sinai	Electoral Commissioner of Papua New Guinea (Head of Delegation)	
2.	Dr. Helder da Costa	General Secretary of g7+	
3.	Dr. Felix Piedade	Chief Operating Officer of g7+	
4.	Mr. Agostinho da Cunha	National Director, Technical Secretariat for Electoral Administration in Timor-Leste	
5.	Mrs. Helche Silvester	Media and Communication Manager of g7+	
6.	Mr. Agostinho Tavares	Policy Assistant of g7+	
7.	Mr. Anito Soares	Tatoli Media, Timor-Leste	