



## **PRELIMINARY REPORT OF THE OAS ELECTORAL OBSERVATION MISSION FOR THE GENERAL ELECTIONS OF AUGUST 5, 2022 IN SAINT KITTS AND NEVIS**

August 15, 2022

The Electoral Observation Mission of the Organization of American States present in Saint Kitts and Nevis congratulates citizens on their peaceful and responsible participation in the General Elections of August 5, 2022, which saw an orderly transfer of authority to a new government.

The Mission, which was led by the former Prime Minister of Jamaica, the Honourable Bruce Golding, comprised eleven experts and observers from nine countries – three of whom worked virtually. On Election Day the team was present in all of the 11 constituencies of Saint Kitts and Nevis and observed the conduct of the poll from the opening of polling stations, through to the closing of polls. At the end of the day, the Mission observed the tabulation of ballots and the transmission of results at five counting centers in Saint Kitts. The Mission also analysed key aspects of the electoral process, including electoral organization and technology, electoral justice, political financing and the political participation of women.

During its deployment the Mission engaged with key stakeholders, including electoral and government authorities, political parties and candidates, civil society actors, the international community and other international observers, to gather perspectives on the organization of the elections and the overall electoral process. The Mission's experts also analysed relevant electoral legislation, regulations and procedures to ensure a full understanding of the context in which the poll was held.

According to information provided by the Electoral Office, 50,933 persons were eligible to vote in these elections - 38,015 voters in Saint Kitts and 12,918 voters in Nevis.

### **PRE-ELECTORAL CONTEXT**

General Elections were last held in Saint Kitts and Nevis in June 2020. A new poll was therefore not constitutionally due until 2025. In early 2022, however, a fracturing of the Team Unity



coalition<sup>1</sup> that had formed the administration since 2015 led to the dissolution of parliament on May 10, and on July 17, the announcement of fresh elections for August 5, 2022 – some three years early. Given the circumstances, the environment in which the 2022 campaign took place was quite negative with harsh rhetoric and personal attacks among political stakeholders both on the campaign trail and on social media platforms. Although all political parties had committed to a Code of Conduct prepared by the Coalition of NGOs,<sup>2</sup> which invited political parties, candidates and supporters to observe responsible forms of behaviour and language, this was not adhered to in practice.

The Mission also noted some distrust surrounding and within the authorities responsible for the organization of the elections. Stakeholders advised that challenges with past Supervisors of Elections have resulted in lingering misgivings around that office and that as the Chair and members of the Electoral Commission typically remain in the background during electoral processes, distrust of the Supervisor's office has the potential to influence the electorate's perception of the overall electoral process.

The OAS Mission witnessed this distrust first hand on the night prior to the General Elections, as rumours of a fire at the Electoral Office quickly transformed into speculation that efforts were being made to tamper with the ballot boxes. As the allegations spread on social media, a crowd of concerned, and at times agitated persons gathered outside of the Electoral Office. OAS observers visited the Office and confirmed that while there was an issue at a nearby building, there were no problems or issues of concern on the premises of the Electoral Office and that the staff were simply engaged in their normal pre-electoral activities. However, it was notable that while this was happening, no member of the Electoral Commission or senior member of staff of the Electoral Office was present to provide information or to allay the concerns of citizens.

The Mission also detected signs of strain in the working relationship between the Electoral Commission and the Supervisor of Elections. Sections 33 and 34 of the Constitution of Saint Kitts and Nevis state, in unambiguous terms, that the Electoral Commission supervises the Supervisor of Elections and that, in the exercise of his functions, the Supervisor of Elections reports to and acts in accordance with the directions of the Electoral Commission. In its engagement with the

---

<sup>1</sup> The Team Unity coalition, launched in September 2013, comprised the People's Action Movement and the People's Labour Party on Saint Kitts and the Concerned Citizens Movement in Nevis.

<sup>2</sup> St. Kitts Christian Council, Nevis Christian Council, St Kitts Evangelical Association, Nevis Evangelical Association, St Kitts-Nevis Chamber of Industry & Commerce, St Kitts & Nevis Bar Association



Commission and Supervisor however, there appeared to be ambivalence on both sides about the practical functioning of their respective supervisory authorities and reporting responsibilities, as well as an underlying lack of trust, which did not seem conducive to effective collaboration.

The Electoral Office's readiness for the election was an area of concern. The parliamentary system of government in Saint Kitts and Nevis allows elections to be called at the discretion of the Prime Minister and, as noted earlier, the 2022 elections were announced some three years early, following the crumbling of the ruling Team Unity coalition. With the May 10 dissolution of the parliament, Section 48 of the Constitution required elections to be held within 90 days. Thus, while the actual date of the poll was not announced until July 17 – some 2 months later - and only 19 days provided thereafter to the election date on August 5, a clear timeframe was nevertheless established – for the electoral authorities and all stakeholders – within which the poll would be held.

The Mission recognizes that some arrangements for the elections could only take place once the actual election date was established. For instance, the preparation and printing of the ballots could only be done after Nomination Day, and the printed ballots were needed in order to prepare the electoral kits. However there were other key election-related actions and preparations which were not necessarily time-bound, which were not concluded until shortly before the elections. For example, the list of polling stations for the elections was only finalised and published on August 2, three days before the poll. Several stakeholders advised the Mission that as a result, some voters remained unaware of where they were supposed to vote. Training sessions for poll staff – at least 10% of whom were new, according to the Electoral Office – were also still being conducted in the days before the election.

In the days before Election Day, multiple stakeholders also shared concerns about the finalization of the Voters' List. According to the Elections Act, a Register of Voters for each constituency must be published no later than January 31 in each year. Subsequently, at a set date in each month (and no later than the 15th of the following month), the Chief Registration Office prepares a monthly list for each constituency, which includes all new registrants and all registrants that have submitted a change of address. Following a Claims and Objections process conducted by the Registration Officer of each constituency, as soon as possible after the fifteenth day of the next succeeding month (and in any case not later than the last day of each such month), corrected monthly lists that incorporate the results of the Claims and Objections process are issued as revised monthly lists of voters. The Register of Voters and the revised monthly Lists constitute



the List for an election, until the Register is replaced the following January. Whenever a writ is issued between the publication of the last revised monthly list and any other revised monthly list, the last revised monthly list shall be used for the purposes of the conduct of the Poll.

For the August 2022 elections, this meant that the Register of Voters and the revised monthly lists issued up to and including May 2022 were deemed to constitute the Voters' List for the elections. The Mission was informed that the Electoral Office did not conduct a complete Claims and Objections process before issuing the revised May list, citing the lack of sufficient time to do so. This generated questions about whether the Voters' List was the proper List on which the elections should be held. The OAS Mission enquired about this issue in a meeting with the Electoral Commission and Supervisor of Elections, and noted some disagreement about how, and whether, the decision to publish the revised May list had been reached.

Subsequently, on Wednesday, August 3, two days before the elections, the Chairman of the People's Action Movement, who was also the party's candidate in Constituency 2, filed a complaint with the courts, challenging the inclusion of the revised May list in the Voters' List, as it contained names that had not been subjected to the mandatory Claims and Objection process. The complaint was heard on August 4 and all parties, including the Supervisor of Elections, agreed to remove 29 new names from the list for Constituency 2, in polling stations 1, 2, 3 and 4, thus resolving the issue. The Supervisor of Elections informed members of the OAS Mission that he had subsequently reprinted the List to conform with the decision of the court.

Another area of concern, and one that was raised in meetings with all stakeholders, was the projected length of time required to tabulate the results of the polls, given the nature of the counting process. In Saint Kitts and Nevis, ballots are not counted at polling stations following the close of the polls. Instead, the ballot boxes are sealed and transported to a counting center in each constituency, where they are opened and counted by the Returning Officer. The Mission was informed by multiple stakeholders that this system typically resulted in an extended delay in the publication of results.

Past OAS Missions to elections in the Federation have consistently recommended electoral reform that allows ballots to be tabulated by the Presiding Officer at each polling station, immediately following the close of the poll. This has not occurred to date. The Mission notes that citizens have a right to receive information on the results of an election in a timely and effective manner, and that extended delays in the announcement of results, can leave space for unhelpful



and harmful speculation. In these elections, with some 30,000 votes to be counted, the final results were not declared until 9:00 AM the following day.

## **ELECTION DAY**

On Election Day the members of the Mission were present in all of the 11 constituencies of Saint Kitts and Nevis and observed the process from the opening of the polling stations through to the closing of polls. Members of the Mission visited 100% of the 128 established polling stations in both Saint Kitts and in Nevis during the day and reported that the process was generally conducted in an orderly and peaceful manner.

OAS Observers reported that polling stations generally opened on time, and that poll workers, along with the required equipment and materials, were present in all locations. The majority of election officials encountered – most of whom were women – were knowledgeable about their duties and executed them in an efficient manner. While the Mission's members observed notable exceptions in one constituency, where some first-time Presiding Officers struggled with the processes to be followed and only opened their polling stations after 8:00 AM, these experiences were not typical.

Representatives of the People's Action Movement, People's Labour Party and St. Kitts-Nevis Labour Party were present in the polling stations observed in Constituencies 1 – 8 on Saint Kitts, while representatives of the Concerned Citizens Movement and the Nevis Reformation Party were present at the polling stations visited in Constituencies 9 – 11 on Nevis. In some instances, the Mission also saw representatives of the Moral Restoration Movement on Nevis.

The Mission observed long lines in many locations in the morning, which continued in some instances through the midday hours. The presence of only one voting booth in each polling station, and the practice of taking a single voter through the entire process before admitting another, did not allow voters to be processed very quickly. In general however, people waited patiently to cast their ballot. The Mission welcomed efforts by the authorities to prioritize voting for the elderly, persons with disabilities and women who were pregnant or accompanied by young children.



The Mission noted that while the spaces in most polling stations were adequate and allowed for the secrecy of the vote, some conditions were quite cramped. Polling Station 3E at the Kim Collins Stadium, for example, could only be accessed by traversing through Stations 3D or 3F. Also, not all polling stations were fit for purpose. In another instance, where the polling station was located in a container, the poll workers and party agents, all women, complained that they did not have access to restrooms.

In many places there was very little or no signage either outside or inside polling locations that could assist voters in identifying their assigned polling stations. While special election officers were present at some locations to guide voters to their correct polling place, this did not occur in all instances. Multiple voters shared with the Mission that they had simply joined the lines at their usual polling place in the hope that they would be able to vote once they arrived at the head of the line.

At the end of Election Day, the Mission observed the process of sealing the ballot boxes at the polling stations and transferring them to the counting centers. The Mission noted a range of experiences across the 11 constituencies in this regard. In some locations polling stations closed promptly at 6:00 PM, with no voters remaining in line. In other locations long lines of voters remained at the official close of poll and, as required by law, were allowed to vote. At one location in Constituency 2, voting was only completed and the ballot box sealed after 10 PM, with the result that the tabulation process for that constituency did not commence until close to midnight on Election night.

The results for each ballot box were delivered directly by the Supervisor of Elections, over the national broadcasting service, as they became available. The Supervisor of Elections also declared the winner of the election in each constituency through this medium once all of the results for a constituency were available. Declaration of the first seat in the 2022 poll (Constituency 10 in Nevis, the constituency with the least number of polling stations and voters) took place at 12:45 AM, almost seven hours after the close of polls. Declaration of the final seat (Constituency 8 in Saint Kitts) was made around 9:00 AM on August 6.

The results indicated that the Saint Kitts-Nevis Labour Party (SKNLP) had won six of the eight seats on Saint Kitts, with the People's Action Movement (PAM) and the People's Labour Party (PLP) winning one seat each. On Nevis, the Concerned Citizens Movement (CCM) won all three seats.



The Mission welcomed the congratulatory statements issued to the SKNLP by former Prime Minister and political leader of the People's Labour Party (PLP) Dr. Timothy Harris, and by the political leaders of the People Action's Movement and Concerned Citizens Movement, following the declaration of the results.

## **FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

During its engagement with the authorities and other stakeholders in Saint Kitts and Nevis, the OAS Mission sought to determine what progress had been made in implementing – or considering the implementation of – recommendations made by previous OAS Electoral Observation Missions in 2010, 2011 and 2015. The Mission found no evidence that any action had been taken in this regard.

The Mission therefore urges the new administration in Saint Kitts and Nevis to make an early and concerted effort to review and consider implementing the recommendations contained in this and in other OAS Mission reports, as they are designed to support the country's efforts to strengthen its electoral system and process and to make them more agile.

For the 2022 elections, based on its analysis of the electoral system, the information it gathered through discussions with national and electoral authorities, political parties, civil society and the international community prior to the elections, and its observations on Election Day, the OAS Mission offers the following preliminary findings and recommendations.

### **I. Electoral Authority**

The Mission noted some levels of distrust by citizens in the office of the Supervisor of Elections, deriving in part from challenges with previous office-holders. The Mission also observed signs of tension in the relationship between the Electoral Commission and the Supervisor of Elections. While the Constitution requires the Commission to supervise the Supervisor of Elections in the performance of his functions, the Commission, in its engagement with the OAS Mission, did not appear to believe it had practical authority to do so. The Mission was also advised that the Electoral Commission does not typically take a leading role in electoral processes, leaving the Supervisor of Elections to be the face of the electoral authority.



Trust in, and within, electoral authorities, is essential if citizens are to have confidence in the integrity of their electoral processes. The Mission therefore recommends:

- In consultation with political parties, exploring strategies for strengthening the Electoral Commission, in order to endow it with greater technical competence, while bolstering its authority and leadership, in order to enhance its management of, and boost public confidence in, the electoral process.
- As advised by the OAS Missions in 2011 and 2015, clearly defining, in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution, the role of the Electoral Commission in its supervision of the Supervisor of Elections.
- As advised by the OAS Mission in 2015, strengthening both the technical and human capacity of the Electoral Office in order to increase its efficiency and agility in the organization and implementation of electoral processes.
- As advised by the OAS Mission in 2015, establishing a comprehensive communications strategy that allows the electoral authorities to provide clear and timely information to all stakeholders, particularly political parties and citizens.

## **II. Electoral Organization**

### Counting of Ballots and Transmission of Results

The process of determining the results of elections in Saint Kitts and Nevis can be a protracted one. Upon the close of polls, ballot boxes are sealed and transported to a central counting center in each constituency, where they are opened and the ballots counted directly by the Returning Officer. As the counting process does not begin until all ballot boxes have been received at the counting center, a delay in closing the polls at any single polling station delays the overall tabulation process for the entire constituency. Even where all polling stations close promptly, the requirement that all ballots cast in a constituency be reviewed by a single person, the Returning Officer, after more than 12 exhausting hours of managing an electoral process, is impractical and inefficient.



As noted earlier, citizens have a right to receive information on the results of an election in a timely and effective manner. The Mission therefore recommends, in keeping with the advice of the OAS Missions in 2010, 2011 and 2015:

- Amending the Elections Act to allow a preliminary count of ballots to be made by the Presiding Officer at each polling station, in the presence of party agents, immediately following the close of polls, both to expedite the count and to enhance confidence and security. This will facilitate a more timely issuance of preliminary results to citizens.
- A second and final count of the ballots can thereafter be undertaken by the Returning Officer to verify the results before they are certified.

### Advanced and Special Voting

In Saint Kitts and Nevis, the National Assembly Elections Act currently has no provisions for advanced voting by poll workers and members of the security services. The Mission was informed that the amendment that allowed advanced voting in the 2015 election was repealed, given concerns that it might allow the choices of those voters to be known.

There are also no provisions in the Act for electors to vote in places other than their designated polling place, including citizens residing overseas, patients in hospitals or nursing homes, or qualified incarcerated persons. As a consequence, voters whose names appear on the Voters' List but are unable to attend their designated polling place on Election Day, are not able to cast their vote.

Access to the vote is an important human right. The Mission therefore recommends:

- Evaluating the possibility of reinstating advanced voting in Saint Kitts and Nevis, and making this opportunity available to poll workers, the security services, and any other person who may need to work in support of the electoral process on Election Day.
- Considering mechanisms to facilitate voting by other categories of persons who may not be able to visit their polling stations on Election Day.



- Ensuring the secrecy of any votes cast during advanced voting processes by sealing the unopened ballots in appropriately marked envelopes, securing them until Election Day, and then delivering them to designated polling stations on the day for intermixing (without being unfolded) and tabulating with ballots cast in the general poll.

## Training

Training for poll workers is essential for the effective conduct of any electoral process, as it ensures efficiency and accuracy in the application of standardized procedures on the day of elections. For the 2022 elections, the Electoral Office informed the Mission that it had conducted a total of 15 training sessions for poll workers; at least one in each Constituency. Mock simulations were also conducted. The Mission was advised that the training sessions were not mandatory, and that the process for ensuring poll workers were adequately prepared for their duties was somewhat informal.

On Election Day, while the majority of Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks with whom the Mission engaged were experienced and capable in carrying out their duties, there were notable exceptions in Constituency 1, where some first-time poll workers did not understand the basic steps required to prepare and open their polling stations and relied on frequent phone calls to the Returning Officer, as well as assistance from party agents, to complete the necessary tasks. In those cases, which were observed directly by members of the Mission, voting did not commence until after 8:00 AM.

To ensure that poll workers are well trained and equipped to carry out their duties on Election Day, the Mission recommends:

- As advised by the OAS Missions in 2011 and 2015, strengthening standardized training programmes for all poll workers, providing opportunities for formal instruction and simulations in the days and weeks prior to an election, to ensure the efficient and accurate delivery of voting procedures across all constituencies in Saint Kitts and Nevis.
- Developing standardized manuals with comprehensive and explicit guidance for Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks on how to carry out their duties. This can be an indispensable reference for poll workers on Election Day, especially for those serving for the first time.

## Signage

The Mission noted that signage identifying polling places and the alphabetical split of specific polling stations was quite limited. While citizens generally seemed to know where polling places were traditionally located, the Mission did not see official signs outside polling places in that regard, or signage inside all polling places guiding voters where to stand in line. In some areas, special election officers were present to guide voters to their correct polling place, but this did not occur in all instances and does not, in any case, obviate the need for proper signage.

The Mission therefore recommends:

- Providing all polling stations with clear signage that indicates their number and alphabetical split, and ensuring these signs are posted well in advance of the start of the poll, so voters can verify they are in the correct locations.
- Preparing and posting informational material regarding voting procedures, to ensure that voters are properly guided when accessing the polls.

### **III. Electoral Boundaries**

The Constitution of Saint Kitts and Nevis establishes a Constituency Boundaries Commission, which is required to periodically review the number of boundaries of the constituencies into which Saint Kitts and Nevis is divided and submit reports to the Governor-General. The Commission is required to review and report on the boundaries to the Governor-General not less than two years nor more than five years from submission of the last report.

The Mission was informed that the Commission was last constituted in September 2020; however, the boundaries have remained unchanged since 1983, creating a deepening inequity in the distribution of electors per constituency.

Schedule 2 to the Constitution includes several rules for the delimitation of boundaries, such as the minimum number of constituencies into which Saint Kitts and Nevis should be divided and the requirement that constituencies include, as far as practicable, an equal number of inhabitants. It also allows for exceptions to the equality rule where required due to population density, the need to ensure adequate representation of rural areas, and geographic features,

among others. However, neither the Constitution nor the National Assembly Elections Act provide any technical rules, procedures or criteria to guide the delineation of constituency boundaries, nor is there any requirement that the Commission include technical experts in this field.

As noted by the OAS Mission in 2015, there is a clear need for a redefinition of constituency boundaries in Saint Kitts and Nevis to comply with the prevailing legislation and ensure a more equitable distribution of voters per constituency.

The OAS Mission therefore recommends:

- Reconvening the Constituency Boundaries Commission at the earliest opportunity allowed by the Constitution to undertake a review that takes account of population changes and ensures the equal representation of electors.
- Either amending the National Assembly Elections Act or developing regulations to clearly establish the rules, procedures and criteria to be followed in defining constituency and polling division boundaries.
- As advised by the OAS Mission in 2015, considering measures to guarantee greater independence of the Commission ahead of subsequent realignments. The Constituency Boundaries Commission should include non-partisan members with the necessary technical expertise to support a legal and technically complex process, which should be transparent, impartial and inclusive.
- Utilizing Global Positioning System (GPS) technology to demarcate Parish, Constituencies and Polling Division Boundaries.

#### **IV. Electoral Technology**

##### Tabulation and Transmission of Official Results

Once voting is completed in each constituency, ballots are transferred from the polling stations to a single counting center where the official vote count is conducted by the Returning Officer. Each Returning Officer transmits the results for his/her constituency to the Electoral Office by



smart phone encrypted text applications, such as WhatsApp, where they are transcribed by hand onto a form, and then consolidated using a computerized spreadsheet.

This method of transmitting and consolidating electoral results is not particularly efficient, nor is it an effective mechanism for ensuring the origin, quality and accuracy of the information received. It also does not provide reliable safeguards against the reporting of incorrect results due to human error during the process.

The OAS Mission therefore recommends, as advised by the OAS Missions in 2010, 2011 and 2015:

- Considering the implementation of an electoral results transmission system that utilizes a secure computer infrastructure.

## Publication of Results

In Saint Kitts and Nevis, election results are announced by the Supervisor of Elections through platforms utilized by the national media. Therefore, upon completion of the voting and counting processes, citizens, political parties and the media alike must await these announcements, which are made as the results for each polling station become available. Previous OAS Missions to Saint Kitts and Nevis have made recommendations regarding this process, which continue to be relevant in the absence of any changes.

The Mission therefore recommends, as advised in 2010 and 2015:

- Creating a protocol for the announcement and publication of results by the Electoral Office, including posting results on an Internet platform to provide actors with alternative means of receiving this information.
- Developing a communications plan for informing all actors about the progress of different steps in the process.

## Information for Citizens

One of the priorities of electoral management bodies must be to ensure that all citizens have easy access to accurate, verifiable information on the electoral process, including the electoral



regulatory framework and calendar, voter registration requirements, the hours of voting, guidelines on how to cast a ballot, and the location of their polling stations, among others. An institutional website that consolidates this information allows the electorate to understand how, when, and where to vote; receive trusted, non-partisan, official information; identify important dates in the election process; and understand their rights as citizens.

In preparation for its observation of the 2022 General Elections, the Mission reviewed the institutional website of the Electoral Commission, hosted on the website of the Office of the Attorney General, and noted that while certain categories of information were available – such as the monthly lists and the Annual Register of Voters – there were no guides that could provide voters with general knowledge about elections and how to cast their votes. Guides with specific information for voters was subsequently posted on the website the day before the election, but this was too late to be of significant use to voters.

The Mission therefore recommends:

- Ensuring essential electoral information and up-to-date material - literature, infographics, videos, and documents – are permanently included on the official website of the Electoral Commission.
- Considering the inclusion of a search feature on the Electoral Commission’s website, which would allow voters to easily verify that their name is on the Voters’ List and identify their designated polling station.

## **V. Electoral Justice**

The electoral system in Saint Kitts and Nevis consists of laws, regulations and procedures that govern the organization of elections for the National Assembly. With regard to election complaints, there are several legal remedies and mechanisms available, including constitutional motions and judicial review. A party could seek judicial review, or file a constitutional motion, either before, during or after the election, depending on the wrong done and the relief sought.

The Mission followed the steps taken by the courts to address the complaint filed by one political party, two days before the election, regarding the proper constitution of the Voters’ List, and was pleased to note that the complaint was heard and resolved expeditiously.



In this context, the OAS Mission recommends:

- Ensuring that the provisions of the Elections Act are strictly complied with at all times, especially during pre-electoral periods.

## **VI. Political Finance**

As observed by the OAS Missions deployed to electoral processes in Saint Kitts and Nevis in 2010, 2011 and 2015, the current Mission noted that there is still no legal framework for the regulation of political financing in Saint Kitts and Nevis. Political party and campaign financing remains entirely private, as there is no direct or indirect public funding for political parties or campaigns. In this context, candidates, parties and campaigns can accept unlimited contributions in any form and in any amount, and from donors that remain entirely anonymous.

While there have been some advances in the adoption of regulatory legislation, such as the Integrity in Public Life Act, passed in 2013 and implemented from 2018, there is currently little expectation or requirement to provide campaign finance accounting or reporting to any public entity. Stakeholders with whom the Mission met, expressed their concern that the lack of transparency and the absence of rules or restrictions on campaign contributions helps to foment distrust in political parties and candidates and the overall electoral process.

Stakeholders also raised additional concerns regarding the equity of the political finance system, including the impact of unregulated use of income from the Citizenship by Investment program; unequal access to airtime on state-run media; and the possibility that public funds channelled through social relief programs could be used to tilt the playing field in favour of a ruling party.

To ensure greater equity and transparency in the acquisition and use of funds during electoral processes, the Mission recommends:

- Establishing limits on private donations and in-kind contributions from individuals, businesses, and the media, and prohibiting anonymous donations.
- Establishing direct or indirect public financing for political parties and campaigns.



- Creating legal standards and practices for recording, managing, and reporting political party contributions and expenditures.
- Strengthening political financing oversight measures and mechanisms, as well as penalties for non-compliance.
- Endowing a regulatory body, ideally a strengthened Electoral Commission, with the independence, authority, capacity and resources to provide oversight and enforce rules, including monitoring and requesting financial reporting from political parties and making such information public.

## VII. Political Participation of Women

Saint Kitts and Nevis has adopted an essential set of universal and inter-American instruments that promote the right of women to participate in public and political life, and to be free from all forms of discrimination and violence<sup>3</sup>. The Constitution guarantees access to full rights and freedoms, irrespective of sex, and establishes non-discriminatory status on the grounds of sex, political opinions, or affiliations, among others, thus providing an essential framework of rights and protections, irrespective of a citizen's gender.<sup>4</sup>

The Mission observed that neither of the documents establishing the legal framework for elections in Saint Kitts and Nevis – the Constitution and the National Assembly Elections Act – contain specific provisions that seek to advance the political participation of women. The Mission however recognizes the efforts of Government to establish an institutional framework that promotes gender equality by launching, in June 2022, the National Gender Equality Policy and Action Plan<sup>5</sup> to strengthen its response to cultural barriers based on gender in the country.

---

<sup>3</sup> The Charter of the Organization of American States (1948); The Inter-American Convention on the Granting of Political Rights to Women (1948); The Inter-American Convention on the Granting of Civil Rights to Women (1948); The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1969); The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979); The Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women "Convention of Belem do Para" (1994)

<sup>4</sup> Chapter II of the Constitution of the Federation, under Protection of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms. And Section 15 relating to Protection from discrimination on the grounds of race, place of origin, birth out of wedlock, political opinions, or affiliations, colour, creed, disabilities, etc.

<sup>5</sup> In accordance with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal No.5 about Gender Equality.



The National Gender Equality Policy and Action Plan aims to address the underrepresentation of women in leadership and decision-making positions within the next five years. Although the strategy foresees the establishment of special temporary special measures for women's leadership and participation to increase the number of women in the Parliament,<sup>6</sup> there are no specific plans to achieve this goal. The Mission also notes that national institutions do not have statistical information disaggregated by sex, such as the list of men and women eligible to vote that had registered to vote, or the list of election workers.

Stakeholders with whom the Mission met shared that while women make up the foundation of political parties in Saint Kitts and Nevis, their leadership is primarily male-driven. While there are no legal or institutional impediments to women's political participation, gender stereotypes deriving from cultural and societal norms do deter women from running for office. For the 2022 poll, seven out of 30 candidates were female - the highest number in the country's history.<sup>7</sup> Only one woman (9.09%) was elected to the new parliament.

To support the efforts of St. Kitts and Nevis to promote equal representation for women in decision-making positions, the OAS Mission recommends:

- As advised by the OAS Mission in 2015, that political parties make greater efforts to actively recruit and nominate women as candidates and to establish codes of conduct within their organizations that prevent and penalize any type of restriction or intimidation towards women.
- Considering the implementation of an effective gender quota in order to encourage gender parity and increase the number of women candidates across all parties.
- Collecting and publishing sex-disaggregated data that would facilitate a deeper analysis of women's participation in political life, including statistical data on candidates, poll workers, persons who register and voters.

---

<sup>6</sup> Gender Equality Policy and Action Plan (GEPAP) for Saint Kitts and Nevis. Leadership and Decision-making. P. 82.

<sup>7</sup> In 2020 there were only two women candidates. Available at: <https://ciwil.org/st-kitts-and-nevis-general-elections-2-women-candidates/>



- Developing training opportunities, mentorship programs and other initiatives to promote women's participation and leadership in politics.
- Providing targeted financial support to promote the political participation of women.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

A detailed report, which expands on the Mission's observations and recommendations, will be presented to the OAS Permanent Council in Washington, D.C. and shared with all stakeholders in Saint Kitts and Nevis.

The Mission thanks the Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis, particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Electoral Commission and the Electoral Office, and all stakeholders with whom it met, for their willingness to engage with the Mission and share their perspectives on different aspects of the electoral process.

The Mission also wishes to thank the governments of Italy, the Netherlands, Peru and the United States for their financial contributions which made this Mission possible.