

Press Release



Organization of
American States

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OAS Electoral Observation Mission in Jamaica - Preliminary Statement

For the General Elections of December 29, 2011, the Electoral Observation Mission of the Organization of American States (OAS) fielded 25 observers from 16 countries in all 8 of the country's administrative regions. A total of 852 of the country's polling stations were visited by the OAS team on Election Day. The following preliminary observations are based on the direct observations of the OAS team, and on meetings with electoral authorities, a cross-section of government, political parties, media, and civil society organizations.

Observations:

- Pre-electoral period

The OAS mission notes the significant preparations made by the Electoral Commission to generate voter confidence and to ensure an inclusive and clean electoral process.

The continued use of the Electronic Voter Identification and Ballot Issuing System (EVIBIS) has strengthened efforts by the Electoral Commission to improve the integrity and access to the voting process. The EOM observed the use of this system in all of the constituencies where it was utilized and wishes to commend the authorities for its introduction.

The Mission took note of the agreements negotiated by the Electoral Commission with political parties on media and advertising protocols, as well as on campaign financing. These agreements have, in our estimation, improved the democratic process and have increased its transparency. In this regard, the EOM welcomed the publication of the list of companies that have made substantial contributions to the two main political parties. The mission was also particularly struck by the undertaking of the political parties to cease all campaigning, campaign ads and polls as of midnight on Tuesday, December 27. It noted however that this did not prevent the publication of opinion pieces by some of the newspapers on December 28.

- Election Day procedures

On Election Day, the OAS observers noted that the polls opened on time in nearly all the observed locations, all essential materials had arrived, and that the poll workers worked diligently to ensure an efficient casting of the vote. For the most part, these officials seem to be well trained and knowledgeable about the procedures. In addition, electors, security forces and party agents were engaged in almost all locations observed by the OAS, demonstrating their commitment to the exercise of the process.

The OAS mission noted a steady, albeit slow, stream of voters from the commencement of voting but observed that several voters seemed uncertain as to how to locate their specific polling station within the polling center. In the majority of these cases, the elector did in fact eventually locate their polling station within the center. In this regard, the Election Day Supervisors attached to clusters of polling stations played a significant role in helping to resolve any issues that arose.

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In some polling centers, polling stations were placed in uncomfortably small spaces next to each other, affording both workers and electors very little privacy and insufficient work space. At several of these stations, this situation also contributed to delays by creating a bottleneck effect on the queue to access the polling area.

- Tabulation and processing of results

After the close of the polls, the vote counting and transmission process moved expeditiously, with results coming into the Election Center as early as 5:30 pm- half an hour after the close polls. The Election Commission must be commended for providing work space for the media at the Electoral Center to access raw data in real time in order to immediately feed their broadcasts.

Recommendations:

Based on the information gathered by the OAS Electoral Observation Mission during its time in Jamaica, the mission would like to offer the following recommendations to further strengthen the electoral process in the future:

- 1) Making provision for the allocation of adequate space for polling stations and identifying wherever possible locations that have both an entrance and exit to facilitate the flow of electors;
- 2) Clarifying the role, duties and responsibilities of the political liaison officer at the polling station;
- 4) Providing adequate signage at the entrance of the polling station to indicate exactly which polling stations are located within that center;
- 5) Providing copies of the voter's list at each polling station in a place it can be easily accessed by voters.
- 6) Continued efforts by the Electoral Commission of Jamaica and other branches of government in seeking the enactment of campaign finance regulations.

A more detailed verbal report on the observations and recommendations of the OAS EOM will be presented to the OAS Permanent Council in Washington D.C. in early 2012. This report will be shared with all stakeholders in Jamaica and will be available through the [OAS website](http://www.oas.org).

The OAS mission wishes to express its thanks to both the Government and Electoral Commission of Jamaica for the invitation to observe this process and the facilitation of information during the mission's stay in the country. In addition, the mission thanks the governments of Bolivia, Canada, Chile and the United States, as well as Elections Canada for their contributions which made this mission possible.

For more information, please visit the OAS Website at www.oas.org.