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American States

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ELECTORAL DELEGATION
Municipal Elections
Bonaire

March 20, 2019

REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION

On February 20, 2019, the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States (GS/OAS) received a formal request from the Kingdom of the Netherlands, through its Embassy in Washington DC, to send an electoral delegation to observe the elections due to be held in Bonaire on Wednesday, March 20, 2019. The elections were for the nine members of the Bonaire Island Council and for the nine members of the Electoral College of the Senate of the Netherlands.

On February 22, 2019, the Secretary for Strengthening Democracy, Francisco Guerrero, accepted the invitation on behalf of OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro. The members of the OAS Delegation comprised Mr. Paul Spencer, Senior Advisor to the Secretary for Strengthening Democracy; Ms. Melene Glynn, Specialist in the OAS Department of Electoral Cooperation and Observation; and Mr. Martin Huenneke, Specialist in the OAS Department of Electoral Cooperation and Observation.

This was the third occasion on which the OAS was present for an electoral process in the Caribbean part of the Netherlands, having previously observed the General Elections in Curaçao in April 2017 and the Parliamentary Elections in Sint Maarten in February 2018. It was the organization's first deployment to Bonaire and the first Dutch election to be observed since the signing of the Arrangement between the Netherlands and the OAS to promote transparency and confidence in electoral processes on December 13, 2018.

It should be noted that the Delegation was not a standard OAS Electoral Observation Mission (OAS/EOM). It arrived in Bonaire three days prior to Election Day and did not include experts in the subject areas typically covered by OAS/EOMs, such as electoral organization and electoral registries, among others. The Delegation deployed on Saturday, March 16 and returned on Friday, March 22, 2019.

2. PRE-ELECTORAL PHASE

To ensure a broad understanding of the context of the electoral process, the OAS Delegation familiarized itself with Bonaire's political and electoral framework prior to its arrival on the island. During the days before the election, the Delegation also met with a wide range of stakeholders, including government and electoral authorities, representatives of the eight political parties, and members of civil society and advocacy organizations. These discussions were indispensable in acquiring deeper insight into the Bonairean electoral process, the level of preparedness of the electoral machinery, issues surrounding the elections and the positions thereon of the various stakeholders.

Most of the political parties with whom the Delegation spoke expressed their confidence in the strength of the electoral process and the integrity of those responsible for executing it on Election Day. However many stakeholders also voiced concerns about certain aspects of the

electoral system, including the proxy system, the distribution of poll cards, limited levels of voter education and issues related to the electoral materials.

The Proxy System

The proxy system was an issue of major concern to stakeholders. Dutch law provides for voting by proxy, whereby a voter may authorize another person to vote on his/her behalf on Election Day. The Delegation noted that voting by proxy can be authorized by a voter by simply signing the back of their poll card and handing it over to another eligible voter, who then presents the poll card, along with a copy of the original voter's identification, at the polling station on Election Day.

Political parties and other stakeholders informed the Delegation of their concern that the process was too effortless, and could be manipulated for bribery or personal gain. They expressed a desire for change in the system – either through greater regulation of the circumstances under which a proxy could be issued, or elimination of the proxy system in its entirety.

Distribution of Poll Cards

The distribution of poll cards was also an issue of significant interest. Under Dutch election rules, all persons eligible to vote should receive an invitation to cast their vote, at their home address, no later than fourteen days prior to Election Day. This invitation includes their poll card, which allows the voter to cast their vote in the polling station of their choice.

The Delegation was advised that local circumstances, including the absence of street signs in some areas and the limited presence of post-boxes, made it challenging for the postal services to deliver poll cards accurately and in a timely manner. Eligible voters who lost, misplaced or did not receive their poll cards were able to request a replacement in writing (*up to and including Friday 15 March*) or in person (*up to and including Tuesday 19 March at 12:00 noon*) and collect them directly from the Civil Affairs Department (*Burgerzaken*). However the Delegation was advised that in the days just prior to Election Day, up to 10% of undelivered poll cards remained uncollected.

Voter Education

In meetings with electoral officials and representatives of political parties, the Delegation heard concerns and complaints regarding the paucity of public voter education on the electoral process in general and political platforms in particular. The Civil Affairs Department informed the Delegation that the late allocation of funding for the elections negatively affected its voter education strategy, and it was therefore obliged to focus its efforts on its webpage and social media platforms. Stakeholders expressed their concerns that voters – especially those who were voting for the first time – were not sufficiently informed on the process and their choices.

Electoral Materials

The Delegation noted that while 75% of the Bonaire population speaks Papiamentu, ballots for the 2019 elections were provided in Dutch only. Members of the Delegation also heard complaints from stakeholders that the ballots for the Island Council and Electoral College elections were similar in appearance and could create confusion among voters. The absence of photos of the candidates or party symbols on the ballots was also deemed a potential challenge for illiterate persons.



The 2019 Elections

For the March 20, 2019 elections, **14,114** persons were registered to vote for the Island Council elections, while **12,649** persons were registered to vote for the Electoral College of the Senate. This was the first time that elections for the Electoral College of the Senate took place in Bonaire.

The eligibility requirements for the two elections differed slightly. Only Dutch citizens, 18 years and older who were resident in Bonaire on Nomination Day, were eligible to vote for the Electoral College. For the Island Council, eligible voters were those persons 18 years and older, who were resident in Bonaire on Nomination Day, and who were included in the Base Registry of Persons BES. Non-Dutch nationals who had legally resided in the Netherlands for at least five years were also eligible to vote for the Island Council.

Following Nomination Day, February 4, 2019, Bonaire's Central Electoral Committee announced that, pursuant to Article G3, paragraph 5, of the Elections Act, the following eight political lists

had registered for the Island Council election. The Delegation took note that approximately 30% of the candidates on the lists were women. The first three lists (Lists 1, 2, and 3) also registered for the elections to the Electoral College of the Senate.

Table 1: Participants in the 2019 Island Council Elections

| LIST | PARTY | AGENTS | CANDIDATES |
|---------------|--|--|-------------------|
| List 1 | Movimentu di Pueblo Boneriano (MPB) | Agent: Gilbert Antonius Subs: Hubert Vis | 35 |
| List 2 | Partido Demokratiko Boneriano (Demokrat) | Agent: Clark CA Abraham Subs: Michael J. Pieter | 23 |
| List 3 | Union Patriotico Boneriano (UPB) | Agent: Jeffrey Levenstone Subs: Pablo J. Kroon | 21 |
| List 4 | Era Nobo | Agent: Eric G. Soleana Subs: Nicole Contreras | 13 |
| List 5 | List 5 | Rafael Santana Rodriguez (sole candidate) | 12 |
| List 6 | Frente Sosial Progresivo (FSP) | Agent: Licerio IR Winklaar Subs: Indra J. Martis | 12 |
| List 7 | Union Pa Pueblo | Agent: Aljano Emerenciana Subs: Rechendel Emerenciana | 14 |
| List 8 | List 8 | | 6 |

Source: Konseho Supremo Elektoral (<https://www.bonairevotes.com/parties-2/>)

3. ELECTION DAY

On Election Day, March 20, the members of the Delegation observed the conduct of the poll at the ten polling stations throughout Bonaire, visiting each polling station at least twice, and observing the operation of the mobile polling station at the island’s prison. The delegation also visited the headquarters of the Central Electoral Committee during the day, to engage with its members on the overall progress of the process.

The Delegation noted that the polling stations it observed opened on time, were properly staffed, and were equipped with the materials required for the election. The polling stations were generally spacious, accessible and well-arranged, and the placement of the voting booths ensured the secrecy of the vote. Efforts were consistently made to assist and prioritize voters with disabilities, pregnant women and the elderly.



While there was a generally tolerant and at times festive atmosphere, the Delegation received complaints from some voters about the length of time they were required to wait in line – one or more hours at times, when the normal wait-time was usually about fifteen minutes. The Delegation noted that the long lines were due to the slow processing of voters at most locations, as the polling staff entered each voter’s data into the electronic tracking system before issuing their ballots. The long lines persisted over the course of the day at some locations, even up to the close of the polls. The Delegation noted that the wait times for voters were considerably shortened once usage of the electronic tracking system was removed from the voter intake process.



The Delegation was pleased to observe the strong presence of women in the management and delivery of the electoral process on Election Day and noted that the majority of poll workers were women.

At the end of Election Day, the Delegation observed the closing and tabulation process at two polling stations, and subsequently monitored the delivery of results at the headquarters of the Central Electoral Committee.

The Delegation commends the poll workers and supervisory personnel for the professionalism and diligence with which they facilitated the conduct of the poll on Election Day.



4. POST-ELECTORAL PHASE

The final count of ballots took place on March 22, 2019. The results issued by the Central Electoral Committee were as follows:

Bonaire Island Council

The results of the Municipal Elections for the Bonaire Island Council gave four seats to the Movimentu di Pueblo Boneriano (MPB), three seats to the Partido Demokratiko Boneriano (Demokrat) and two seats to the Union Patriotico Boneriano (UPB). Of the 14,114 registered voters, 9,060 cast ballots, resulting in an official voter turnout of 64%. The votes were distributed as follows:

Table 2: Results of the 2019 Island Council Elections

| LIST | PARTY | TOTAL VOTES | % | SEATS |
|--------|--|-------------|-------|-------|
| List 1 | Movimentu di Pueblo Boneriano (MPB) | 3,575 | 40.4% | 4 |
| List 2 | Partido Demokratiko Boneriano (Demokrat) | 2,132 | 24.1% | 3 |
| List 3 | Union Patriotico Boneriano (UPB) | 1,791 | 20.2% | 2 |
| List 4 | Era Nobo | 394 | 4.5% | 0 |
| List 5 | List 5 | 63 | 0.7% | 0 |
| List 6 | Frente Sosial Progresivo (FSP) | 479 | 5.4% | 0 |
| List 7 | Union Pa Pueblo | 367 | 4.1% | 0 |
| List 8 | List 8 | 44 | 0.5% | 0 |

| | | | | |
|--|---------------|--------------|-------------|----------|
| | Invalid Votes | 97 | | |
| | Blank Votes | 118 | | |
| | TOTALS | 8,845 | 100% | 9 |

Source: Konseho Supremo Elektoral (<https://www.bonairevotes.com/results-er/>)

Electoral College of the Senate

The results of the elections for the Electoral College of the Senate gave four seats to the Movementu di Pueblo Boneriano (MPB), three seats to the Partido Demokratiko Boneriano (Demokrat) and two seats to the Union Patriotico Boneriano (UPB). Of the 12,649 registered voters for the Electoral College, 7,210 cast ballots, resulting in an official voter turnout of 57%. The votes were distributed as follows:

Table 3: Results of the 2019 Elections for the Electoral College of the Senate

| List | PARTY | TOTAL VOTES | % | SEATS |
|--------|--|--------------|-------------|----------|
| List 1 | Movementu di Pueblo Boneriano (MPB) | 3,097 | 45.6% | 4 |
| List 2 | Partido Demokratiko Boneriano (Demokrat) | 2,166 | 31.9% | 3 |
| List 3 | Union Patriotico Boneriano (UPB) | 1,530 | 22.5% | 2 |
| | Invalid Votes | 93 | | |
| | Blank Votes | 324 | | |
| | TOTALS | 6,793 | 100% | 9 |

Source: Konseho Supremo Elektoral (<https://www.bonairevotes.com/results-of-the-electoral-college-2019/>)

5. OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The OAS Electoral Delegation wishes to congratulate the people of Bonaire on the conclusion of a peaceful and orderly electoral process.

As noted at the beginning of this report, the OAS Delegation arrived in Bonaire three days before Election Day and did not include experts in the subject areas typically covered by OAS Electoral Observation Missions. Given this fundamental difference in its nature, the Delegation is not in a position to provide the same breadth of technical recommendations on the electoral process and framework as a full-fledged OAS Electoral Observation Mission.

However, based on its observations in the pre-electoral phase and on Election Day, and the information gathered in meetings with stakeholders, the OAS Delegation wishes to offer the following observations and recommendations for the consideration of the authorities of Bonaire and the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Good Practices Observed

The Delegation commends the Bonairean authorities on the several good practices observed during the electoral process, including the informational letter sent by the Lieutenant Governor to first-time voters, the training workshop for political candidates and the deployment of the mobile polling station. The Delegation encourages the authorities of Bonaire to continue to employ these practices and to consider opportunities for their further enhancement.

The public information forum organized by the Chamber of Commerce was also an excellent example of the valuable role that can be played by civil society during electoral processes. In the interest of strengthening local electoral processes, civil society organizations, political parties and government authorities may wish to consider additional initiatives that could be developed to this end. A multi-sectoral Code of Conduct for political parties is a possibility in this regard.

Recommendations

The Proxy System

Considering the many concerns expressed by stakeholders regarding the current proxy system in Bonaire and its potential to impact election outcomes, the electoral authorities should consider modifying these practices by establishing more stringent criteria for obtaining a proxy, pursuing more assertive prosecution of proxy violations, and providing enhanced voter education about the consequences of proxy fraud.

Distribution of Poll Cards

In order to address the several concerns voiced regarding the distribution of poll cards, the Delegation suggests that the authorities consider:

- i) Initiating the distribution of poll cards earlier than the fourteen days currently provided in the electoral law, and where multiple elections are to be held on the same day, ensuring that all poll cards for the same voter are issued together instead of separately.
- ii) Developing alternatives for the secure and timely delivery of poll cards, including the installation of street signage and residential mailboxes where they do not currently exist. Public announcements can also be employed to provide greater awareness and clarity on the deadlines for collecting poll cards from the Civil Affairs Department, as well as instructions on how to treat with the non-arrival of poll cards.

Voter Education

In light of the concerns expressed regarding the paucity of voter education, municipal and electoral authorities should promote greater awareness of the electoral framework, electoral process and other key topics prior to elections. The provision of sufficient, cost-free air time on radio and television to each political party would also help to ensure voters are aware of the diverse policy platforms.

The OAS Delegation further recommends building upon the practice of sending informational letters to new voters, to distribute information about the electoral process more widely. These materials should be in the four languages used locally - Dutch, Papiamentu, Spanish and English.

Electoral Materials

To ensure equal access for all voters, the Delegation recommends that ballot papers and instructions for voters also be provided in the four languages used locally - Dutch, Papiamentu, Spanish and English. The ballots for different elections should also be more visually distinct from one another, and include candidate photos and party logos for the benefit of persons with literacy challenges.

Electoral Organization

Considering the very long lines for the 2019 polls, the authorities may wish to add some flexibility to the schedule of the mobile polling station, deploying it to assist those polling stations with very long lines, instead of to predetermined locations only.

Campaign Finance

In Bonaire, as in Holland, public financing is not provided for municipal elections. From its discussions with stakeholders, the Delegation also understands that private financing is not easily available, as the local business community is cautious about political involvement. In this context and in the absence of campaign finance legislation at the municipal level, there is a significant potential for the influence of unknown money. The Delegation suggests that consideration be given to creating or adapting political finance rules for elections in Bonaire, including contribution limits and reporting requirements, in keeping with the island's particular political and electoral circumstances.

Political Participation of Women

The Delegation was pleased to note the high levels of participation by women in the administration of the electoral process, including as members of the Central Electoral Committee and as polling station officials. As candidates, women made up approximately 30% of the party lists for the Island Council Elections, and four of the nine members of the Island

Council elected (44%) were women. While recognizing that there is no Dutch legislation requiring political parties to increase the proportion of women candidates, the Delegation encourages all stakeholders to continue efforts to promote the participation of women in political processes in Bonaire.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The OAS Electoral Delegation wishes to thank the Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (in particular the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations and the Permanent Observer of the Netherlands to the OAS), the Bonaire authorities (in particular Lieutenant Governor Rinja and his staff), the Central Electoral Committee, the National Office for the Caribbean Netherlands (in particular the Communications team), the stakeholders with whom it interacted and all citizens, for their cooperation in facilitating the Delegation's work.

The effort to strengthen democracy and ensure the resilience of democratic systems in the western hemisphere and globally requires the collective commitment and collaboration of like-minded partners. The support of the Netherlands for the work of the OAS to ensure transparent, inclusive and credible elections in the hemisphere, including the strengthening of regional electoral cooperation, is a valuable contribution to this end.