

Solidarite Fanm Ayisyen - SOFA
Conseil National d'Observation Électorale - CNO
Conseil Haïtien des Acteurs Non Étatiques - CONHANE
Réseau National de Défense des Droits Humains - RNDDH

Press Release

Contact :

Marie Yolène GILLES COLAS
RNDDH
(509)3728-8466

Attorney Gédéon JEAN
CNO
3795-6597

Edouard PAULTRE
CONHANE
3701-5654

Marie Frantz JOACHIM
SOFA
3813-0517

Preliminary observations concerning October 25th elections

As a Coalition, *Solidarite Fanm Ayisyèn – SOFA, Conseil National d'Observation des Elections (CNO), Conseil Haïtien des Acteurs Non Etatiques (CONHANE) and Réseau National de Défense des Droits Humains (RNDDH)* meticulously observed the October 25th elections and would like to share with concerned sectors and the public its preliminary observations. The present press release reflects the positive and negative aspects of the October 25th, 2015 elections as well as our recommendations.

I. Positive Aspects

a) Efforts were made by the Provisionary Electoral Council (CEP) to ensure better preparations for the October 25th elections

The following facts indicate improved preparations by the *CEP* for the October 25th, 2015 elections:

- Availability of the electoral lists *thirty* (30) days before election day and proper identification of the voting stations
- Accreditation cards for electoral observation organizations, representative of political parties and candidates were made available within a reasonable time. These cards represent efforts to diminish possibilities of fraud.

- Timely delivery of the electoral materials to the polling stations with few exceptions.
- Replacement of electoral officials across the country who were implicated in acts of embezzlement and massive fraud during the August 9th, 2015 elections, with the exception of the Southeast Department where a complete reevaluation of the August 9th, 2015 elections was conducted.
- Improved involvement and accountability of the *Haitian National Police (PNH)* in providing security during the elections. Arrests carried out in all geographic departments contributed to a smoother voting process.
- In certain areas of the country, the *Haitian National Police Superior Council (CSPN)* installed surveillance cameras in order to document possible cases of violence, fraud, or to dissuade possible trouble makers.

b) Gender Equity

The coalition also noticed that the CEP involved a substantial number of women in the electoral process. There was at least one woman amongst the staff at polling stations which adheres to the provisions of the electoral decree concerning the quota for the participation of women.

II. Negative Aspects

a) Communication Problems

Although the CEP has shown its involvement in the planning of the October 25th, 2015 elections, the coalition believes that certain decisions were not well communicated or adopted by those responsible in the voting centers. Whereas the CEP decided to prohibit observers from wearing t-shirts identifying their organizational affiliations, in several voting centers throughout the country, observers were refused entrance because they did not wear observer t-shirts.

Furthermore, in numerous voting centers, those responsible refused access to several electoral observers whose accreditation cards they believed should have been stamped by the *Departmental Electoral Bureau (BED)* and the *Communal Electoral Bureau (BEC)*.

b) Excessive Measures Taken by Officers of the Haitian National Police

The excessive security measures taken by officers of the *PNH* have, in certain voting centers, discouraged voters from participating at the polls. The body search to which they were subjected created long lines in front of the centers. Determined but not patient enough, voters left the line and went home without voting.

c) Participation Rate

The participation rate of 25% was already low, but the actual voter turnout is even lower because this number includes political party representatives and observers who voted several times.

III. Irregularities

a) Installation / Opening of Polling Stations

The Coalition estimates that at least 95% of the polling stations were installed as planned.

In general, the voting centers opened their doors after 6AM. This delay is to a large extent due to the fact that during this time of the year it is still dark at that time. According to their testimony, those responsible for the voting centers had no electricity and therefore were unable to start the process on time as initially planned.

Moreover, the political party representatives were not authorized to enter the voting centers and polling stations before 6AM to observe the voting process.

The Coalition also noticed that certain polling stations opened 2 to 4 hours after the officially announced opening time.

b) Privacy and Position of Polling Booths

Those responsible for the voting centers and the members of the polling stations did not seem to be concerned about the secrecy and privacy of voters. Voters, representatives of political parties, and candidates showed up with bracelets carrying messages promoting their candidates, they carried with them business cards of their candidates, or were wearing t-shirts with political messages.

Certain voters and political representatives openly declared their vote and continued to campaign for their candidate inside the polling stations.

In certain polling stations, the polling booths were placed on the floor, on benches, close to the window, on air conditioning units, and even on a bucket filled with water. The placement of the polling booths did not guarantee voters the privacy to which they were entitled and their votes were not secret at all.

c) Polling Stations

Frequently, the polling stations were installed in cramped spaces that were often difficult to access, leading to a disorganized process. Certain voters were obliged to fulfill their civic duty in the blistering sun since some polling stations had been installed in courtyards and gardens.

d) Lack of Identification of People Involved in the Electoral Process

Numerous members of the polling stations did not wear a uniform or a badge even though the CEP had provided these for them. In most cases, it was the women who did not seem to have any problems wearing the CEP t-shirts.

The CEP's decision not to allow electoral observers to wear identifying t-shirts resulted in difficulties identifying observers from a distance and to determine to which organization they were affiliated.

The officers of the *PNH* and the members of the polling stations were unable to distinguish electoral observers from voters, nor representatives of political parties and candidates. Consequently, certain rules applying to political party representatives were also enforced upon observers.

Indeed the identification of electoral observers proved to be important. For example, on the evening before the polls, on October 24th, 2015, the CEP decided to disallow an organization called *Unité Nationale pour le Développement Appliqué* (UNADA) from the electoral observation process on account of fraud and sale of accreditation cards. However, UNADA observers were allowed access to voting centers and were still able to conduct electoral observation on October 25th, 2015 without any problems.

The same applied to observers of the *Centre d'Observation et de Formation Electorale* (COFE) who behaved as representatives of political parties. They were able to do so because they were wearing badges that required one to be close in order to identify the organization to which they were affiliated.

Fake observer accreditation cards were also circulating on election day. Some of them were even seized by officers of the Haitian National Police (PNH).

IV.- Fraud

a) Rotation of Political Party Representatives

A very specific number of mandates, determined by the CEP, were issued to political parties and their representatives. This allowed the CEP to anticipate the problem of crowding in the polling stations given the large number of political parties and candidates. In order to allow all to have access to the voting centers, the CEP proposed a system of observation through rotation. In general, this method proved to be effective. However, many political party representatives claimed that they presented themselves at voting center and were not allowed inside. This leads us to believe that certain political parties were given priority over others.

The rotation was not exclusive to political party representatives. Voters were allowed back into polling stations and consequently were able to vote several times.

b) Sale of Accreditation Cards of Political Party Representatives

Apart from the electoral observation organizations such as UNADA, COFE and Ligue Haïtienne d'Action Civique et Morale (LHACIM), political parties and candidates were selling accreditation cards to other parties than those to which they belonged. These cards were available on the market for the price of *one thousand five hundred* (1,500.00) gourdes per card.

Cards of political party representatives were photocopied. Moreover, the corner of the card which must be removed after a representative has cast his vote, was not always removed as it should, allowing certain representatives to vote several times.

c) Dealings of Those Responsible for Voting Centers

Before the counting of the ballots, some of those responsible for the voting center forced political party representatives and observers to leave the voting center.

d) Stuffing the ballot boxes

There was systematic stuffing of ballot boxes in several voting centers.

V.- Recommendations

The Coalition congratulates the CEP for having taken into account certain recommendations made by human rights organizations in order to correct the mistakes of August 9th. The Coalition applauds the numerous efforts taken by the CEP to create a secure environment on Election Day. In order to ensure that the results reflect the reality of the voting, the Coalition recommends the following to the CEP:

- Specify the exact number of accreditation cards that were delivered to organizations involved in the electoral observations
- Share the operational protocol of the tabulation center, specifically the treatment of voter ballots.
- Share the method of recruitment of lawyers/auditors that are to handle the voter ballots in the tabulation center.
- Communicate the procedures and motives for putting the voter ballots in quarantine
- Clearly explain what happens to blank votes since option appears on voter ballots as 'no candidate' whereas the tally sheet does not include such category.
- Verify the information concerning all voters that voted elsewhere rather than at their assigned polling station, in the presence of electoral observers and representatives of the political parties and candidates concerned.

Port-au-Prince, October 27, 2015