



Organization of  
American States

**REPORT TO THE PERMANENT COUNCIL**  
**OAS ELECTORAL OBSERVATION MISSION**  
Saint Kitts and Nevis  
General Election, February 16th, 2015

Ambassador Neil Parsan, Chair of the Permanent Council  
Interim Representative of Saint Kitts and Nevis to the OAS, Justin Hawley  
Secretary General, Jose Miguel Insulza  
Assistant Secretary General, Ambassador Albert Ramdin  
Permanent Representatives and Permanent Observers  
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honor for me to appear once again before this Permanent Council, this time to report on the OAS Observation Mission to St. Kitts and Nevis this past February.

**Background**

In response to an invitation from the government of St. Kitts and Nevis to observe the General Elections of February 16, 2015, Secretary General Insulza appointed me to lead a team of 11 experts and observers, representing eight nationalities.

This is the third mission that the OAS has deployed in St. Kitts and Nevis, the first two being the General Elections on January 25, 2010 and the Nevis Island Assembly Elections on July 11, 2011.

**Pre-electoral period**

In the days prior to the election, the Observation Mission met with representatives of political parties, electoral authorities, government officials, members of civil society organizations, local media representatives, as well as local and international observers, to gather information and discuss their views on the electoral process.

The political-electoral context of the 2015 St. Kitts and Nevis elections was marked by a number of concerns. These concerns were chiefly related to the administrative and logistical aspects of the electoral process under the responsibility of the Electoral Office.

The pre-election period also was marked by controversy over the proposed realignment of constituency boundaries. The Observation Mission followed closely the appeal filed by opposition groups with regard to the last-minute parliamentary approval of the constituency boundary changes suggested by the Constituencies Boundaries Commission. The Mission took note of the ruling, a few days before the election, of the Privy Council in London, which invalidated the proposed boundary changes and required that the election retain the previous boundaries. The resolution of this matter earlier in the electoral period would have facilitated a smoother organization of the electoral process.

Further, some problems were observed with regards to timeframes and deadlines of the electoral process, particularly the publication of the Voters' List.

Concerns were also raised by multiple stakeholders regarding the registration process and the duration of the electoral campaign, as well as the perception of unequal access to media and financial resources.

During the pre-electoral period, the Mission observed insufficient information to the general public on the organization and preparations for the election. Less than five days before elections, many electors did not know exactly where they had to vote or which candidates would be on the ballot in their constituency.

### **Election Day**

The Observation Mission was pleased to observe the implementation of early voting for essential services personnel and security forces on Saturday, February 14, two days before the General Election. Nonetheless, that process lacked clarity, particularly with regard to the location of polling places and voting hours. The confusion over early voting procedures affected the counting process on Election Day.

On Election Day, observers visited 89% of polling stations in all 11 constituencies of the Federation. Observers were present from the opening of the polls until the counting of the ballots. Observers reported that most of the polling stations opened on time, were adequately staffed and fully equipped with all of the materials required for the election. The Observation Mission congratulates presiding officers, returning officers and poll clerks for their extraordinary commitment in the exercise of their duties. Citizens waited patiently, sometimes in long lines, to exercise their right to vote in an orderly and peaceful manner.

The Mission observed that the counting and transmission of results was extremely slow, stemming from procedural difficulties. More than 12 hours after the closing of the polls, there was no information on the outcome of the election, leading to speculation and uncertainty. The delay in the dissemination of results was related to two main factors. First, the counting process started late due to the last-minute instructions with regard to the transportation of the ballot boxes from the early voting the previous Saturday. Second, challenges were presented during the counting process and some results were contested. While this is not unusual, voters were not made aware of these challenges until late in the counting process.

### **Post-electoral Period**

As a result of the procedural difficulties related to the counting and transmission of results, preliminary results were announced by the Supervisor of Elections almost 24 hours after polls had closed in each of the 11 constituencies of the Federation. Furthermore, the final results and vote tallies were extremely delayed, and were not published until more than two weeks after Election Day.

Final results gave seven seats to the opposition coalition, Team Unity, three seats to the ruling St. Kitts and Nevis Labor Party, and one seat to the Nevis Reformation Party.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The Observation Mission would like to congratulate Prime Minister Timothy Harris and Team Unity for its victory in this General Election. The Mission also congratulates the citizens of the Federation for their active participation in this election. This was reflected in a high voter turnout and in the peaceful exercise of their right to vote.

In support of continuous efforts by St. Kitts and Nevis to strengthen its democracy and electoral system, and based on information gathered by direct observations of the OAS team, as well as in meetings with stakeholders, the Electoral Observation Mission would like to offer the following recommendations:

### **1. Constituency Boundary Realignment**

The Observation Mission recognizes the political will among all parties regarding the need to realign the constituency boundaries in order to guarantee a more equal representation of the electorate, as required by law. Nevertheless, the Observation Mission received complaints from various groups regarding the manner in which proposed boundary changes were presented by the Constituency Boundaries Commission and approved by the National Assembly on the same day that the Assembly was dissolved. The Observers did not gain access to a copy of the Constituencies Boundaries Report despite various formal requests. The Observation Mission suggests that further actions be taken by the Authorities to guarantee a more inclusive debate on the constituency boundaries issue that could facilitate consensus among all political parties long before the next general elections.

The Mission heard concerns regarding the need to give the Constituency Boundaries Commission institutional autonomy. In the view of the Observer Mission, the Constituency Boundaries Commission should function as a permanent institution integrated by non-partisan members with the necessary technical expertise to manage such a legal and technically complex process.

Furthermore, the next Constituency Boundaries Commission should establish clear procedures, guidelines and criteria for the constituency delimitation process, granting political parties, members of the National Assembly and other stakeholders full access to information regarding the boundary delimitation process.

### **2. Early voting**

For future electoral processes, the Observation Mission strongly recommends that the electoral authorities implement a timely communication strategy to inform all actors about early voting procedures, including the handling of ballot boxes on election night.

### **3. Voters List and the Electoral Registry**

During the pre-electoral period, the Observation Mission received a number of claims regarding the timing in which the Voters' List was provided to political parties. The law required that the final version of the List be published by no later than January 31, 2015 in order to facilitate its review before Election Day. Nevertheless, the final Voters' List was made available to the political parties only two days before Election Day, leaving insufficient time for objections and corrections.

As observed in previous elections, some political groups brought to the attention of the Observers that the Voters' List included names of people who had either died or, more commonly, did not reside in the constituencies in which they were registered. The Observers also heard expressions of concern regarding the relatively high number of voters who came from abroad to vote on Election Day but who may have been improperly registered in a constituency in which their vote would have the most positive impact for a specific party. The Observation Team strongly recommends that for future elections, the Electoral Office ensure that the Voters' List be provided to political parties according to the schedule and procedures established by law. Furthermore, the Electoral Office should carry out an audit of the Voters' List on a regular basis to reduce inaccuracies.

#### 4. Electoral Administration

The Electoral Office apparently did not develop or share with political stakeholders a detailed calendar with dates by which all elements of the electoral process were to be completed. Such a calendar would facilitate the work of the Electoral Office, improve coordination with stakeholders and raise the confidence of all Federation citizens in the electoral process. In addition, the Mission recommends that the Electoral Office be staffed by professionals without direct ties to political groups. Selection of the Electoral Office leadership should be based on technical merit and aim for consensus among all political parties. The Observation Mission also considers it important to strengthen both the technical and human capacity of the Electoral Office personnel in order to increase its efficiency and effectiveness in preparing for and conducting elections.

#### 5. Political Financing

The Observation Mission heard concerns regarding the lack of legislation to regulate political party and campaign finance. The Observation Mission reiterates the 2010 recommendation with regard to a cross-party accord on political financing that would promote transparency and accountability. Consideration should be given to enacting legislation on the issue.

#### 6. Media Access

For the 2015 electoral campaign, political parties purchased time and advertising space on selected private media. However, members of the opposition and representatives of civil society complained that the state-owned television station did not provide equitable coverage to the opposition campaign. The Mission reiterates its recommendation following the 2010 elections that legislation should be considered to guarantee media access to all political parties.

#### 7. Vote Counting and Transmission of Results

Stronger mechanisms should be put in place to ensure that final results are tabulated and published faster after the close of polls. As recommended by the 2010 Observation Mission, in order to expedite the count and enhance security, discussions should also be held on whether the counting process could be done at each polling station by Presiding Officers, instead of the centralized counting that creates delays in the process.

Furthermore, the Observation Mission recommends the use of an Internet platform to keep all actors informed about the transmission of results and to avoid confusion. Official results promulgated by the electoral authority should take place in a transparent manner, in the presence of the media.

## 8. Participation of Women

The Observation Mission was pleased to observe that women play active and visible roles within political parties, not only at grassroots, but also at leadership levels. Nonetheless, only one woman out of 22 candidates was nominated for the 2015 General Elections. Greater efforts should be made by political parties to actively recruit and nominate women as candidates and to establish codes of conduct within their organizations that will prevent and penalize any type of intimidation towards women. Public education programs should be put in place to raise awareness on the importance of the participation of women in politics and build support for legislated quotas to ensure women equal access and participation.

## **Acknowledgements**

The OAS Mission wishes to thank the Government of St. Kitts and Nevis for the invitation to observe this process and to the political parties, civic groups and, above all, the citizens of the Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis for their cooperation and openness in facilitating our observation tasks.

In addition, the Mission would like to thank the governments of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, France, Spain, United Kingdom and the United States for their contributions that made this mission possible.

The Mission would like to take the opportunity to call on donor countries to continue supporting the efforts of the General Secretariat of the OAS by providing funds for technical cooperation projects aimed at following up on the recommendations of the Electoral Observation Missions and on the strengthening of electoral bodies in the region.

Finally, the Mission would like to emphasize the importance of receiving invitations from Member States to deploy observation missions earlier in the electoral process to facilitate the OAS's fundraising efforts and to be able to adequately observe all stages of an electoral process.

A more detailed final report on the observations and recommendations of the OAS Electoral Observation Mission will be published in the coming months.

Thank you for your attention and a special thanks to the Secretary General for giving me the privilege of leading this Mission.

With your indulgence, I would also like to join all who are taking advantage of similar opportunities to publicly thank the Secretary General for ten years of leadership and for his untiring efforts on behalf of this organization. Those of us who have had the privilege to work with him understand the many challenges he faced and admire his never-ending quest for a better future for the people of the Americas.