

SADC-CNGO



Southern African Development Community – Council of Non-Governmental Organisations

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PRESS STATEMENT

for IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SADC-CNGO Pre-Election Assessment in Lesotho

During the last five years, SADC-CNGO observed elections in a number of countries in the SADC region, including the 2012 National Assembly Election in Lesotho. Through these efforts, SADC-CNGO aims to contribute towards the democratization of the region by ensuring that the rights and aspirations of citizens are fully guaranteed and respected, empowering them to fully participate in socio-economic decision-making in respective member states.

It is within this context that SADC-CNGO deployed a pre-election assessment Mission to Lesotho from the 11th to 13th of February 2015 under the leadership President Lewis Mwapu. The purpose of the Mission is to assess the preparedness of Independent Electoral Commission and Basotho to conduct free and fair elections scheduled for the 28th February 2015. The outcome of the assessment Mission will contribute towards the declaration of the SADC CNGO observer mission, which will be deployed in the next two weeks. .

During the mission, we met with various stakeholders, including political parties, CSO and the Independent Electoral Commission of Lesotho.

The mission observed the following:

- While the time allocated for the preparation of election was very short, stakeholders are ready for the elections to take place on the 28th February 2015. Accordingly, the Independent Electoral Commission is equally ready to conduct free and fair elections notwithstanding initial challenges;
- Stakeholders raised a major concern about security challenges and persistent tension and division among elements of the Lesotho security formations. This remains a top priority to be addressed before the election;
- Further challenges have been noted, including polarisation of the media along political party preferences, corruption, tension among political parties, highly politicised & partisan civil service and leadership vacuum as well as absence of clear vision for the country to permanently resolve the persistent sources of crisis that led to the current challenges.

WE can all recall that these snap National Assembly scheduled for 28th February 2015 is a result of the collapsed relations among leaders of the coalition government including unnecessary confrontation between the security formations. For this reason, SADC-CNGO considers the upcoming elections as yet another critical opportunity to consolidate democracy and ensure long term stability for Lesotho, and call on all stakeholders, including Basotho, organised civil society organisations, business sector, political parties, government institutions, the IEC and SADC as a guarantor of the peace process in Lesotho, to among others:

- SADC must urgently put in place an immediate plan to ensure deterrence of an active security sector's (the military, police and prison services) interference with electoral processes and a long-term roadmap for security sector reform. SADC mission must also ensure peace and stability by its presence for at least four months after the election;
- SADC must further put in place a detailed and coordinated roadmap for parliamentary and constitutional reforms, public sector reform and public finance management reform to build a long term and sustainable democratic dispensation, accountable and independent institution and supportive environment to ensure that the persistent instability that Lesotho periodically experiences is permanently addressed;
- Political parties to respect and adhere to the various accords and pledges they have signed towards free and fair elections, respect the will of the people as expressed by the electorate during the elections;
- Political parties to encourage and promote women public representatives during these elections in line with SADC Protocol on Gender and development;
- The IEC to continue to perform its tasks in an impartial and credible manner;
- Civil Society in Lesotho to continue to contribute and play an active role in ensuring a transparent and credible election and also empower citizens to be active agents in the developmental processes.

SADC-CNGO is the lead apex organization of NGOs operating in the 15 SADC countries. Its strategic objective is to facilitate engagement between NGOs and SADC and ensure their effective participation in regional integration and development processes. Its secretariat sits in Gaborone, Botswana.

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