



European Union Election Observation Mission to East Timor

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A RESULT IN WHICH WE CAN HAVE FULL CONFIDENCE

Initial Statement by the Chief Observer of the European Union Election Observation Mission

John Bowis MEP, the Chief Election Observer of the European Union Election Observation Mission today expresses the satisfaction of himself and his 40-strong observer team in the campaign, polling, counting and declaration of the result of the East Timor Presidential election. A final report will be produced shortly.

"First, of course, on behalf of the European Union Election Observation Mission, I give my warmest congratulations to East Timor's **new President** on his election. Secondly I salute the **East Timorese people** for the way they conducted themselves before, during and after the election. I wish President and people well as they now move towards May 20th and Independence.

"I am very happy to confirm that our **conclusion** is that the way the campaign has been run and the way election officials carried out their duties, both on Polling Day and at the Count, means we can have **full confidence in the result**.

"Overall the picture on **Polling Day** was one of confident competence among the polling station staff in most areas and this continued through the transport of ballot boxes, their opening, reconciliation and counting. The former was wholly (in the case of stations) and equally (in the case of centres) the responsibility of East Timorese staff and the latter a joint effort by international and local officials.

"The **training** for this was effective and it means there is a competent team of East Timorese to run elections in the future, even if they may need to seek continuing advice and support from international experts.

"**Turnout**, at 86.2% according to preliminary results, was very high and the low number of abstentions, blank ballot papers and voting for both candidates shows the voters were not misled and that they understood the importance both of voting and of voting for one candidate only.

"The **campaign** between the two candidates was courteous and without personal abuse. Where there were more aggressive statements, these came from other individuals, not in the entourage of either candidate, and such interventions proved ineffectual.

“Party agents and **national observers** were evident at polling stations and counts. They seemed generally alert and well informed as to the procedures. A meeting of 13 local observer groups confirmed their view that the election was satisfactory.

“Some **concerns** we have that need to be addressed for the future are:

- It is important that elections continue to be supervised by an **independent electoral body**, comparable to the IEC. It is also important that the experience gained by Timorese election personnel is retained and developed.
- The right to vote at this election without a **register of voters** was acceptable in the special circumstances of this Presidential election in East Timor. It enabled anyone to vote anywhere, which was helpful for returning refugees and for those affected by the rainy season. It is unfortunate that the UN could not rectify the civil register on time to dispose of accurate and complete voter lists for this election. In future there should be an accurate electoral register for each polling centre area.
- **Evidence** of having voted was the inked finger and the sticker on the proof of registration card or paper. Neither is satisfactory for the future nor a sufficient safeguard against double voting. The inked finger is visible and could be a deterrent to voting if there is ever intimidation of people to persuade them to vote or not to vote. The sticker was supposed not to be removable, but, where people had laminated their card for protection, the sticker could be removed without leaving a mark.
- **Proof of Identity** was based on the photograph on the proof of registration card. If a genuine ID card is to be part of the system in the future, photographs need to be of better quality
- **National observers** should be encouraged to organise themselves into coordinating networks, to ensure greater influence and an adequate spread of monitoring throughout the Country. Individuals need to be registered and accredited, as well as their organisation, to ensure there is public confidence in their impartiality.
- Although there were more **polling centres** this time, many voters still had to travel considerable distances, often on foot. A further decentralisation of polling centres should be considered.
- An extensive **length of time** between the close of poll and the declaration of result is not desirable. Counting could take place at the polling centre, under the supervision of the Presiding Officers. If it is still considered preferable to count at District level, additional trained counters would speed up the counting process. People in occupations such as teaching could be considered.

Finally I would congratulate the **United Nations Transitional Authority** for their work to ensure the smooth running of the election and, in particular, the **Independent Electoral Commission** for their planning and training and overseeing of all the electoral arrangements. The **real winners**, however, in this election are the **East Timorese people**. To them I say: “You have once again shown your determination to participate in

the democratic process. You have done so with dignity and maturity. You can look forward with confidence to Independence. We in the European Union are ready to work in partnership with you in this new Chapter in the History of Timor Lorosa'e."