



A well managed election day – important shortcomings demonstrate need for continued reform

Blantyre, 21 May 2009: The European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) to Malawi concludes that the election campaign and election day for the presidential and parliamentary elections in Malawi on 19 May 2009 were conducted in a calm and responsible atmosphere, with fundamental freedoms of expression and movement respected in most parts of Malawi.

The election day saw millions of citizens going to cast their vote. Polling staff were highly committed to the process and ensured an open election day, despite minor problems. European Union observers reported that polling officials acted with integrity and transparency guaranteeing the veracity of the voting and counting processes. However, during the campaign period a number of problems exposed structural and regulatory weaknesses which need to be addressed so that Malawi can fully meet its commitments to international and regional standards for elections.

“I must commend the millions of Malawian citizens who demonstrated their commitment to democracy and development by casting their vote in a calm and orderly manner at polling stations throughout the country. We observed highly motivated polling staff working professionally for long hours despite the many logistical challenges in the run-up to the polls,” the Chief Observer of the EU EOM and Vice President of the European Parliament, Luisa Morgantini stated. “Malawi has made an important step towards consolidating its democracy.”

The Chief Observer however, stated that publically owned broadcasters MTV and MBC as well as the private radio station Joy FM failed to provide balanced coverage of the campaign. The use of state resources by the incumbent party for campaign purposes also did not provide for a level playing field for campaigning.

The Electoral Commission has so far organised this election in an independent manner and although it faced many challenges that exposed a lack of capacity, it managed to prepare for an election day that generally guaranteed universal suffrage. Civil society was also actively engaged in these elections and was involved in voter education and monitoring that contributed to broadening participation.

The EU EOM which has been present in Malawi since 7 April 2009, deployed 77 observers from 23 European Union Member States and Norway to all 28 districts of the country to assess the election process against international and regional standards for elections as well as the laws of Malawi. The EU EOM wishes to express its appreciation to the Government of Malawi and the Electoral Commission for their cooperation and assistance in the course of the observation. The EU EOM will continue to observe the ongoing results process, and any complaints that may be filed with the relevant authorities. Within two months of the conclusion of the electoral process, the Chief Observer will return to Malawi to present a detailed report on the elections with possible recommendations to the Electoral Commission.