



EUROPEAN UNION ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION NEPAL Constituent Assembly Election 2008

Largely successful election day despite tense campaign marks step towards inclusive democracy

Kathmandu, 12 April 2008 – The Constituent Assembly election represents a crucial step towards an inclusive democracy in Nepal and has so far met several international standards. On election day polling went smoothly overall, despite a limited number of cases of violence and attempts to disrupt the poll leading to the cancellation of voting in some polling stations. By contrast, the campaign period was tense across the country and marred by incidents of intimidation and violence.

“I commend the people of Nepal for the largely peaceful way in which voting took place despite the difficult circumstances. Voters turned out in large numbers and showed a genuine commitment to an inclusive election,” said Jan Mulder, Chief Observer of the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM). *“It is now our sincere hope that, as the counting process gets underway across the country, all political parties and their leaders will respect the will of the people and the rule of law by waiting patiently for the election results.”*

During the campaign period there were numerous incidents of clashes between members of political parties and, regrettably, a number of people were killed. The lack of law and order and poor security environment contributed to a general atmosphere of fear and intimidation and at times undermined the right to campaign freely. Freedom of speech in the media was generally respected but there were a number of assaults on journalists and one journalist was kidnapped during the final days of the campaign.

The election commission was independent, largely transparent and conducted technical preparations efficiently. However, it failed to address numerous complaints about breaches of the code of conduct related to partisan government employees, misuse of state resources and electoral violence. The unclear appeals process and lack of a consolidated election act is also a cause for concern, although the legal framework has generally provided for a democratic and inclusive election process in line with international standards. The introduction of a quota system for women and traditionally marginalized groups is a significant step forward but may not necessarily guarantee as wide a representation in the Constituent Assembly as originally intended.

“This long awaited election has demonstrated the enthusiasm of Nepalese people for multi-party democracy and constitutional reform,” said Josep Borrell, the head of a delegation from the European Parliament, which is part of the EU observation mission. *“We urge political parties to act responsibly in the coming weeks and show commitment to furthering the country’s democratic progress. The election commission should also ensure the detailed publication of the final results as a safeguard to ensure transparency.”*

The EU EOM will continue to observe the rest of the election process closely, including the count, tabulation of results, the response of the election administration to complaints and the adherence of political parties to the principles of the code of conduct. A more comprehensive, final report including recommendations for future elections will be published in June.

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