

## **Communique on the state of preparedness for the Election Day and other observations**

1. Motivated by the dictates of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Number 16, the Malawi Electoral Support Network (MESN) and the Council for Non-Governmental Organisations (CONGOMA) jointly convened a Civil Society Networks Elections Coordination Planning meeting with various stakeholders, on the 16<sup>th</sup> May 2019 at Sunbird Lilongwe Hotel
2. Under SDG 16, state parties, including Malawi have committed to seek peaceful and inclusive societies, rule of law, effective and capable institutions. The meeting sought to ensure that the electoral activities on 21 to 22 May, covering polling, vote counting, transmission and determination of results should be peaceful and credible; the processes especially polling should be sufficiently inclusive and that the management, transmission, determination and announcement of results will be in full compliance with the dictates of the electoral law; and the performance of state agencies especially the Electoral Commission and the Malawi Police Service would demonstrate institutional capabilities and effectiveness.
3. Twenty-one sector networks were represented and several stakeholder organisations participated including the Malawi Police Service, Malawi Electoral Commission, Malawi Human Rights Commission, Ministry of Gender, Children , Disability and Social Welfare, the 50:50 Campaign Management Agency, and Malawi Congress of Trade Unions, the Non-Governmental Organisations Board, among others.
4. On the basis of lead presentations, the meeting deliberated on the following topics:
  - i. Civil society interventions to ensure that the electoral process on the polling day and its outcomes will be credible and inclusive;
  - ii. Management of polling, vote counting, results transmission and announcement of results;
  - iii. State of preparedness of the Malawi Police to provide adequate security for the votes and the people; including prevention and timely responses to Violence Against Women in Elections (VAWE);
  - iv. Role of civil society observers in managing and resolving any potential disputes on the Election Day.
5. **Take home messages on the various topics**
  - 5.1. **Civil society interventions**
    - i. Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) by the Malawi Electoral Support Network (MESN) based on a sound statistical sample of polling stations will be

used by all stakeholders to VERIFY official results of the presidential election that will be announced by the Electoral Commission. The PVT will contribute to the assessment of the credibility of the electoral process and the legitimacy of the electoral outcomes.

- ii. The PVT will be based on two commentary samples drawn from all the 28 districts of the country – one sample of 800 polling streams with 498,062 registered votes and another of 809 polling stations with 1,332,907 registered voters.
- iii. Violence Against Women in the electoral process is of particular concern. Under the Gender Elections Engagement Room (GEER), MESN will continue to monitor and collaborate with relevant stakeholders such as Police for effective response. The Police, political parties and polling staff across the country are called upon to be vigilant and to take adequate measures to prevent violence in any form and to mitigate it when it occurs, especially against women on the Election Day until the announcement of results.
- iv. MESN and other stakeholders will operate a Gender Elections Engagement Room on the Election Day. Any acts of electoral violence should be reported to the Malawi Police Service for immediate redress on the polling day;
- v. Participants observed that a significant number of CSOs that were accredited to provide civic and voter education were unable to carry out their roles due to lack of funding.
- vi. Participants observed that the electoral process continues to be insufficiently inclusive of women as aspirants as well as candidates. Participants observed late start of the women's political empowerment effort for the 2019 elections among other challenges.

## **5.2. Electoral management**

- i. The credibility of the electoral process from polling to announcement of results is hugely dependent on the vigilance, diligence and professionalism of political party monitors and the urgency of civil society observers at the polling stations, Constituency, District and the National Tally Centres;
- ii. Political party monitors at all levels should retain and keep safely the signed results forms for purposes of reconciling of results announced at different levels;
- iii. The administrative ban on transfer of voters from one polling station to another by the Electoral Commission have a significant potential to disenfranchise registered and willing voters while managing the public perception of illegitimate or ineligible people being allowed to vote. Participants urged the Electoral Commission to find a better way for future elections to avoid disenfranchisement of voters, especially now that we have adopted biometric voter registration;

- iv. Participants noted enhancements to the results management system including writing of results in figures and words, use of pre-printed self-carbonated results sheets, use of independent auditors in processing results at tally centres and transmission of results using a secure web link.

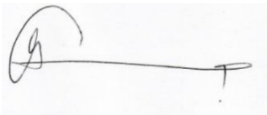
**5.3. Security of votes and people**

- i. The Malawi Police Service is guided by the Malawi Election Security Strategy and the Election Security Master Plan
- ii. 11,550 officers will be deployed to cover polling stations and tally centres, and they will be drawn from the mainstream Police Service, Malawi Defence Forces, Prison Services and Department of Immigration;
- iii. Rumours were dispelled that the Malawi Police Service is involved in a scheme of electoral fraud to aid non police personnel sympathetic to the ruling party to access polling stations and tally centres disguised as police officers. If any officer behaves suspiciously and potentially in contravention of electoral laws, he or she should be reported to the presiding officer at the polling station, Electoral Commission and the Police Incident Command Centres immediately.

**5.4. Conflict management and resolution**

- i. Elections are a human process involving many stakeholders with varied interests. Disputes and conflicts should be expected;
- ii. Electoral laws provide mechanisms and processes for responding to or addressing disputes;
- iii. CSO observers should quickly bring their observations to political party monitors who can directly engage presiding officers at the polling stations and/or should report the observation to the Electoral Commission
- iv. In getting involved in managing and resolving electoral disputes and conflicts, CSO observers shall be impartial and non-partisan and shall ensure that their conduct and posturing does not amount to electioneering.

Signed



Steve Duwa

**Chairperson of MESN & CONGOMA**