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## **Malawi Electoral Support Network (MESN)**

### **Pre-Election Statement on the 2019 Tripartite Elections**

**18<sup>th</sup> May 2019**

#### **Introduction**

The Malawi Electoral Support Network (MESN) is a registered network of 27 non-governmental and faith-based organizations in Malawi. MESN was formed with the core objective of facilitating coordination among civil society organizations engaging in election monitoring, civic and voter education in Malawi and a platform for dialogue, advocacy and lobbying on electoral matters. Since its establishment in 2003, MESN has successfully observed the 2004 and 2009 parliamentary and presidential elections as well as the 2014 tripartite elections.

For the 2019 tripartite elections MESN has been comprehensively monitoring electoral processes and the electoral environment. MESN recruited, accredited, trained and deployed 57 Long-Term Observers (LTOs) who have observed the pre-election period in all 193 constituencies across the country since February 2019. MESN also deployed 386 observers during the MEC biometric voter registration exercise and, subsequently, to observe instances of violence against women in elections (VAWE) under Gender Elections Engagement Room (GEER).

#### **MESN's Overview of the Electoral Context**

Preparations by the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) appear to be on track, however MESN will continue to observe the delivery of materials to polling stations in the immediate days prior to Election Day. During the pre-election period, MESN engaged the MEC to discuss preparations for the 2019 Tripartite Elections, and noted in its published statements concerns about the allocation of vehicles for the delivery of materials.

However, MESN's pre-election reports have raised various concerns related to: politically-motivated violence; vandalism of party materials; traditional and religious leaders engaging in partisan politics; the use of government resources, including vehicles, by political parties for campaign purposes; and continued reports of political parties and candidates distributing handouts to voters despite the prohibition of the practice. MESN is particularly concerned by politically-motivated violence against women, as well as the use of derogatory and inflammatory language against women. MESN also notes that there will be large numbers of first-time voters, and while voter education in recent weeks has increased, civic and voter education, particularly targeting special interest groups (women, youth and people with disabilities), was not as prevalent as in past electoral cycles. MESN is concerned that various political parties have continued to make allegations of vote rigging, potentially unduly undermining public confidence in the electoral process. MESN also notes concerns about widespread disinformation about the elections (fake news).

## **MESN's Election Day Observation**

For the 2019 Tripartite Elections, MESN will deploy nearly 1,400 volunteers to observe across the entire country on Election Day. A total of 907 Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) Observers will observe at polling stations and polling streams while 61 will serve as District Supervisors who will be mobile observers. Under the GEER project, MESN will deploy 386 observers on election day. MESN's leadership will also fan out across the country to observe voting and counting. MESN's volunteers will be found safeguarding the election in every region, district and constituency.

All of MESN's Observers have been carefully selected from member organizations, thoroughly trained by MESN, and their details submitted to the MEC for accreditation. All have been given a copy of MESN's Code of Conduct and all have signed MESN's Neutrality Observer Pledge to ensure honest and accurate reports. MESN has made every effort to promote the participation of women and youth in its observation efforts; 45% of MESN's PVT Observers are women and 71% are youths 18 to 35 years old.

All of MESN's PVT Observers will arrive at their assigned polling stations and polling streams at 5:00am and remain throughout voting and counting until the official results for the entire polling station have been announced and posted. Throughout the day, they will send eight observation reports from a detailed checklist via coded text message (SMS) using their own mobile phones to the MESN National Data Centre located at the Mt Soche Hotel in Blantyre. This will provide MESN with near real time information on the conduct of the election.

## **The Parallel Vote Tabulation Methodology**

PVT is the most sophisticated citizen observation methodology. It employs statistics and information and communication technologies (ICTs) to provide the most accurate and timely information on the conduct of voting and counting and to help ensure that the official presidential results as announced by the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) accurately reflect the ballots cast by voters.

Citizen observers have used PVTs to promote credible elections around the world and across Africa, including in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Malawi, Kenya, Nigeria, Zambia and Zimbabwe. PVT is not new to Malawi. PVTs have been conducted in Malawi for presidential elections in 1999, 2009 and 2014.

PVT provides the most accurate and timely information on the conduct of voting and counting because reports are collected from a scientific sample of polling stations and polling streams and reports are transmitted in near real time via coded SMSs using mobile phones. Because MESN's PVT Observer reports come from a scientific sample of polling stations and polling streams, the findings are true for *all* polling stations and polling streams (even those without a MESN PVT Observer).

MESN's PVT sample includes 800 polling stations and polling streams are located in every region, every district and every constituency of the country. To ensure MESN's PVT sample is truly representative, the percentage of sampled polling streams in each region, district, and constituency closely matches the percentage of all polling streams for that region, district, and constituency. For example, Central region has 42.3% of all polling streams while 42.4% of PVT

sampled polling streams are in Central region. Thus, the composition of the PVT sampled polling streams closely matches the distribution of all polling streams in the country.<sup>1</sup>

We also wish to underline the fact that PVT is the only methodology that can independently verify the accuracy of the official presidential results as announced by the MEC. MESN will only be verifying the accuracy of the results of the presidential election and not the official results for other elections. Verification is done by adding together the official results for the presidential election as announced by polling officials at sampled polling stations and polling streams which have been transmitted by PVT Observers directly to MESN's PVT Data Centre by coded text message. The PVT is *not* an exit poll and PVT Observers do not ask anyone for whom they voted. The PVT relies on the official results from polling stations and polling streams. PVT Observers do not count ballot papers themselves, but only witness the process. However, PVT Observers will report on which political parties had representatives present for the counting of the presidential ballot papers and whether they agreed with the results announced by the polling officials.

While MESN will independently verify the accuracy of the presidential results as announced by the MEC, MESN does not announce official results or declare the winner of an election. The MEC is constitutionally mandated to announce official election results. PVTs serve as an important deterrent to prevent results from possibly being manipulated either at polling stations and polling streams or at any point during the collation process. All Malawians should have greater confidence that the official presidential results as announced by the MEC will truly reflect the ballots cast at polling stations and polling streams because of MESN's PVT. MESN is conducting a PVT on behalf of all Malawians and not for the benefit of any political party or candidate.

## **Conclusion**

MESN will hold a press conference at 10:00am on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May at the Mt Soche Hotel, Blantyre to share our detailed preliminary findings on voting and counting. Immediately after the MEC announces the official results for the presidential election, MESN will release its verification statement on the accuracy of the official presidential results. As appropriate MESN may issue additional statements on the Election Day processes or the accuracy of the presidential results.

*MESN encourages all Malawians to go out and vote on Election Day.* Malawians who are registered to vote should go to their polling stations and exercise their constitutional right to vote.

*MESN calls on all candidates, parties and their supporters to be patient and to be peaceful on Election Day and during the post-election period.* MESN advocates that if candidates and parties have any grievances with the election processes or results that they peacefully pursue the legal avenues provided for seeking redress.

*MESN calls upon the security forces to conduct themselves in a strictly non-partisan manner and ensure a peaceful environment in which all Malawians feel free to vote.* The presence of

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<sup>1</sup> Table 1 demonstrates the representativeness of the PVT sample by comparing the distribution of all polling stations, polling streams and registered voters with the PVT sampled polling stations, polling streams and registered voters by region and district.

security forces should be sufficient to give voters confidence to go to the polls without intimidating supporters of any candidate or party.

*MESN calls upon the MEC to be as transparent and consultative as possible on Election Day and during the announcement of results. While no election is perfect, by providing information and working with all stakeholders (candidates, political parties, civic organizations and observer groups) the MEC can help ensure credible elections that are accepted by all.*

*Finally, MESN reminds all candidates, political parties and Malawians that its PVT will provide accurate, independent verification of the official results for the presidential election. If MESN's PVT findings are consistent with the official results for the presidential election then candidates, their supporters and the general public should have confidence that they truly reflect the votes cast.*

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'S' and 'D' followed by a horizontal line ending in an arrowhead.

Steve Duwa  
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**On our website:** <http://mesnmalawi.org/>

**On Twitter:** @mesnmw

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Table 1: Comparison of Distribution of All MEC Polling Streams and MESN PVT Sampled Polling Streams by Region and District										
		All MEC Polling Streams				MESN PVT Sampled Polling Streams				
Region		Stations	Streams	RVs	% Streams	% RVs	Streams	RVs	% Streams	% RVs
Central		2,024	4,674	2,920,965	42.3%	42.6%	338	211,518	42.3%	42.5%
Northern		1,373	2,313	1,326,690	20.9%	19.3%	167	96,648	20.9%	19.4%
Southern		1,605	4,071	2,613,183	36.8%	38.1%	295	189,896	36.9%	38.1%
<b>Total</b>		<b>5,002</b>	<b>11,058</b>	<b>6,860,838</b>			<b>800</b>	<b>498,062</b>		
Region	District	Stations	Streams	RVs	% Streams	% RVs	Streams	RVs	% Streams	% RVs
Central	Dedza	237	507	310,159	4.6%	4.5%	36	21,512	4.5%	4.3%
Central	Dowa	206	511	324,563	4.6%	4.7%	37	23,133	4.6%	4.6%
Central	Kasungu	289	560	324,881	5.1%	4.7%	40	23,833	5.0%	4.8%
Central	Lilongwe	571	1,557	1,011,553	14.1%	14.7%	113	73,443	14.1%	14.7%
Central	Mchinji	150	378	242,140	3.4%	3.5%	27	17,144	3.4%	3.4%
Central	Nkhotakota	150	296	178,071	2.7%	2.6%	22	13,043	2.8%	2.6%
Central	Ntcheu	166	367	228,432	3.3%	3.3%	27	16,817	3.4%	3.4%
Central	Ntchisi	122	218	129,863	2.0%	1.9%	16	9,893	2.0%	2.0%
Central	Salima	133	280	171,303	2.5%	2.5%	20	12,700	2.5%	2.5%
Northern	Chitipa	168	202	95,714	1.8%	1.4%	15	6,561	1.9%	1.3%
Northern	Karonga	131	245	146,421	2.2%	2.1%	17	10,480	2.1%	2.1%
Northern	Likoma	8	12	6,975	0.1%	0.1%	1	744	0.1%	0.1%
Northern	Mzimba	563	849	478,327	7.7%	7.0%	62	34,985	7.8%	7.0%
Northern	Nkhatabay	129	198	106,089	1.8%	1.5%	14	7,352	1.8%	1.5%
Northern	Rumphi	108	177	96,635	1.6%	1.4%	13	7,415	1.6%	1.5%
Southern	Balaka	152	274	156,398	2.5%	2.3%	20	10,859	2.5%	2.2%
Southern	Blantyre	196	728	497,481	6.6%	7.3%	53	35,788	6.6%	7.2%
Southern	Chikhwawa	161	407	258,518	3.7%	3.8%	29	18,132	3.6%	3.6%
Southern	Chiradzulu	85	224	145,698	2.0%	2.1%	16	10,581	2.0%	2.1%
Southern	Machinga	181	406	250,831	3.7%	3.7%	29	18,530	3.6%	3.7%
Southern	Mangochi	261	626	402,886	5.7%	5.9%	45	29,930	5.6%	6.0%
Southern	Mulanje	134	422	282,150	3.8%	4.1%	31	20,585	3.9%	4.1%
Southern	Mwanza	42	83	48,306	0.8%	0.7%	6	3,354	0.8%	0.7%
Southern	Neno	69	103	56,061	0.9%	0.8%	7	3,574	0.9%	0.7%
Southern	Nsanje	110	233	145,511	2.1%	2.1%	17	10,756	2.1%	2.2%
Southern	Phalombe	90	257	167,492	2.3%	2.4%	18	11,931	2.3%	2.4%
Southern	Thyolo	176	437	279,284	4.0%	4.1%	32	20,310	4.0%	4.1%
Southern	Zomba	214	501	319,096	4.5%	4.7%	37	24,677	4.6%	5.0%
<b>Total</b>		<b>5,002</b>	<b>11,058</b>	<b>6,860,838</b>			<b>800</b>	<b>498,062</b>		

Note: RV stands for Registered Voters

Note: Excludes 32 satellite polling streams

Source: MEC and MESN