



Press Statement on the commencement of voting (in Harari, Somali and SNNP Regional States) as well as the referendum in the SNNP Region
6th General Elections of Ethiopia
30 September 2021, Addis Ababa

On 21 June 2021, Ethiopia held the sixth general and regional elections in six regional states and two city administrations. However, several regional states did not cast their votes in June because of security challenges, irregularities during voter registrations as well as election day and logistics challenges. In addition to general and regional elections, the South West Ethiopia referendum did not take place in June. Initially, the NEBE identified 6 September 2021 as the date of the supplementary elections in areas where voting did not take place in June. However, the NEBE later moved the date to 30 September 2021, and announced the elections would only take place in the Harari and Somali regions as well as parts of the SNNP regional state in a statement issued on 23 August 2021. The board announced however that the Benishangul Gumuz, Oromia and Amhara regions would not vote in September as anticipated. The NEBE also announced that re-election would take place in several parts of the SNNP region including the South West Referendum.

Recognizing the importance of this round of voting, the Coalition of Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations for Election (CECOE) recruited, trained and deployed 956 stationary and 37 mobile observers to all locations where the NEBE is conducting elections, including the Harari, Somali and SNNP regions as well as other cities, like Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa, where ethnic Hararis are voting for the Harari National Assembly.¹ The coalition is observing all elections being conducted, including those to elect members of the House of People's Representatives, regional councils and the Harari National Assembly, as well as the South West Referendum and voting in the Qoloji IDP Settlement located in Somali Regional State. Given the multitude of elections taking place, CECOIE deployed 34% of its observers to locations where referendum was taking place while 66% of polling stations voters cast their votes for House of Peoples' Representatives and Regional Council ballots. Observers have been trained on CECOIE's systematically

¹ The Harari National Assembly voting is a unique electoral procedure introduced by a decision made by the House of Peoples' Representatives in 1995 GC to allow ethnic Hararis living inside and outside the Harari Region to vote for the Assembly, which has 14 seats. This procedure was unsuccessfully contested by the NEBE in the run-up to the 21 June 2021 elections.



designed election day checklists and critical incident forms translated in languages that observers understand. Stationary observers will text in their assessment to CECOIE's data center in Addis Ababa using coded Short Message Services (SMS) and unique observer IDs. Up until these preliminary observation findings were drafted 941 trained and accredited observers have texted in their responses to CECOIE's data center. Considering the network challenges in some parts of the country where observers were deployed, CECOIE expects more reports to come in as the day goes on. As the Coalition analyzes and verifies information collected from observers using its data center, CECOIE would like to note that findings might vary following verification of information sent by observers.

The following preliminary statement is based on information sent by 941 observers on the arrival of observers to polling stations, the opening of polling stations and the setup of polling stations before voting commences.

- Polling stations are supposed to open at 6 AM for voters. To assess the compliance of electoral officials to this requirement, CECOIE observers were asked to arrive at polling stations as early as 5:30 AM. In 96% of polling stations visited by CECOIE, NEBE electoral officials were present at the polling station when observers arrived at polling stations at 5:30 AM. In addition, CECOIE observers also reported that 99% of polling stations visited opened on time for voters to cast their ballots.
- Generally, CECOIE observers were allowed access to polling stations upon presenting accreditation badges from the NEBE. In 99% of polling stations visited by CECOIE, observers were allowed to observe upon arriving at polling stations. However, there were isolated incidents in the Harari, Somali and SNNP regions as well as in one of the Harari National Assembly voting stations in Addis Ababa where observers were told they cannot observe despite presenting their accreditation badges. CECOIE quickly reported these issues to the NEBE, which promptly responded to make sure observers with proper accreditation badges were allowed to access polling stations.
- In order to ensure voters are given equal opportunity to cast their ballots, polling stations ought to be established in places accessible to all members of a community. According to CECOIE observers, 96% of polling stations visited by CECOIE were located in a place easily accessible to persons with disabilities and mobility challenges. In the same light, a majority of polling stations visited by the Coalition (97%) were established in locations equally accessible to both male and female voters.



- Regarding electoral officers at polling stations visited by the Coalition, an average of four electoral officials were present at polling stations where voting started of which 37% were female electoral officials. In addition, CECOIE's preliminary findings show that 23% of the chairpersons in polling stations visited by observers were female. While these numbers are somewhat encouraging, it must be noted that despite NEBE's position to have at least one female electoral officer in 12% of the polling stations visited by CECOIE there were no female electoral officers.
- One of the most evident challenges in the June elections was the lack or shortage of electoral materials at polling stations. This challenge clearly affected the voting and counting process as well as affecting the electoral timeline of the June elections. According to reports collected by CECOIE thus far - apart from isolated incidents which are being further investigated - electoral materials such as ballot papers, ballot boxes and seals, official NEBE stamps, indelible ink and Reconciliation and Result Forms were available at polling stations . CECOIE will follow this throughout the day as voting continues until 6 PM. However, CECOIE would also like to highlight that it has received and confirmed a report that in one polling station in the Wolaita Zone, the voter roll was lost leading electoral officials to commence voting after signing a testimony form.
- Another finding from CECOIE's observation reports collected thus far is the amount of party agents present at polling stations during when the polling station was opened. In 77% of polling stations visited by CECOIE, party agents were present when polling stations were opened.
- Previous observation findings of CECOIE for the June rounds of voting show that compliance with precautionary measures to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus pandemic was one of the shortcomings of the NEBE in the context of the Sixth National and Regional Elections. Recognizing this, CECOIE asked questions related to the compliance with COVID19 protocols in relation to the set-up of polling stations. According to reports collected thus far, in 68% of the polling stations visited by CECOIE, the queue outside polling stations only partially allowed or did not allow social distancing while the inside of the polling station only partially allowed or did not allow social distancing in 56% of polling stations. This suggests a continuation of the problem from the June elections to the September round of voting.

In addition to election day reports collected by CECOIE, the Coalition has received and confirmed 15 critical incidents including the isolated incidents discussed above regarding denial of access to polling stations and lack of materials when voting started. The Coalition expects to receive more reports as voting and counting



takes place in the three regional states. CECOIE has been and will be sharing its critical incident reports with the NEBE throughout the voting and counting process.

As noted in the opening section of the current statement, these findings are based on information collected regarding the opening and setup of polling stations. CECOIE expects to issue a statement on the voting, closing and counting processes on October 1, after collecting all necessary information from each polling station observers were deployed to.

Finally, The Coalition calls on citizens, political parties and the government to patiently and peacefully await for the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia to declare the results of the election.

To access any information regarding the work CECOIE has been doing, please follow the Facebook and Twitter pages of the Coalition. You may also contact the Public Relation Officer of the Coalition via +251913923542 or via info@cecoe.org