



## **PRELIMINARY STATEMENT BY THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (CARICOM) ELECTORAL OBSERVER MISSION ON THE GENERAL ELECTIONS IN THE TURKS AND CAICOS ISLANDS ON 9 FEBRUARY 2007**

At the invitation of the Governor General of Turks and Caicos Islands, a three-member CARICOM Electoral Observer Mission critically observed the General Elections held on Friday, 9 February 2007.

The Mission comprised Mr. Carson Raggie, Supervisor of Elections, Saint Lucia/Head of Mission, Mr. Elon Daniels, Internal Auditor, Electoral Office, Jamaica, and Ms Mignon Bowen, Project Officer, CARICOM Secretariat.

The principal tasks of the Observer Mission were to monitor the preparations for the Elections, the comportment of electoral officials and political stakeholders; and observe the electoral process, including the conduct of the Poll and the counting of the ballots. The Mission was also mandated to assess the outcome of the Elections and its impact on the political environment.

In discharging its functions, the CARICOM Electoral Observer Mission met with His Excellency the Governor General, the Assistant Commissioner of Police, Operations, and candidates of the political parties; the Progressive National Party and the People's Democratic Movement. The Observer Mission also held extensive discussions with the Supervisor of Elections. The Mission exchanged notes with the UK-based Electoral Reform International Services (ERIS) Observer Group.

On Polling Day, the three members of the CARICOM Observer Mission were deployed in the two Constituencies (Grand Turk and Providenciales). Members of the Mission were warmly accepted and made to feel welcome at Polling Stations. The Mission observed the opening and closing of the Poll, and the counting of the ballots at selected Polling Stations.

Members of the Mission visited all of the Polling Stations on Grand Turk and Providenciales which represented about 67% of the total number of Polling stations. The Mission therefore had an opportunity to make a reasonable assessment of the electoral process.

The Mission's preliminary assessment is that the preparations for the conduct of the Elections were adequate, despite concerns raised about the Voters List in relation to registration of voters, in particular during the registration calendar i.e. the period following the announcement of the election date to the publication of the Final Voters List through to Elections Day. The

Mission also felt that greater effort could have been made in the area of voter education, particularly given the number of rejected ballots recorded.

It was felt that the conditions existed for the free expression of the Voters' will. The voters turned out in large numbers and queued in an orderly manner, exercised patience and were able to cast their ballot without hindrance or intimidation.

The General Elections were conducted in a peaceful manner. The voting process ran smoothly, without any semblance of violence, despite reports of minor incidents prior to Polling Day.

The Polling Stations were managed competently and the electoral officials carried out their duties in a professional and impartial manner. In general, transparency of the voting process was ensured, the secrecy of the ballot was respected and stipulated procedures were consistently and uniformly followed, although there were minor variations in the administration of, and deviations from, required procedures.

The CARICOM Electoral Observer Mission is of the view that the results of the General Elections reflected the will of the people and their commitment to the democratic and electoral processes. Such commitment would no doubt be enhanced by a better voter education programme and more effective administration of the electoral process.

The Observer Mission therefore wishes to commend the people of the Turks and Caicos Islands for their high level of maturity in ensuring that the General Elections were conducted peacefully and in an environment conducive to the free expression of the will of voters.

The findings and recommendations of the Mission, including suggestions for improving the electoral system and enhancing the integrity of the electoral process, will be submitted in the Mission's report to the CARICOM Secretary-General.

The CARICOM Electoral Observer Mission wishes to take this opportunity to express thanks to the Governor General and people of Turks and Caicos Islands for the courtesies extended to it.

The Observer Mission also expresses thanks and appreciation for the cooperation received from the Office of the Supervisor of Elections and the Police. Sincere gratitude is extended, too, to the candidates of political parties, the Media and the Electoral Reform International Services (ERIS) Observer Group.

Finally, the CARICOM Electoral Observer Mission expresses thanks to the Returning Officers, Presiding Officers, Poll Clerks and last, but not least, the drivers, whose cooperation contributed significantly to the success of the Mission.