



STATEMENT ISSUED BY THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (CARICOM) ELECTORAL OBSERVER MISSION TO THE GENERAL ELECTIONS IN ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES ON 28 MARCH 2001

The CARICOM Electoral Observer Mission was mounted in accordance with the provisions of the Grand Beach Accord and the commitment given to the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines by the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community.

The main tasks of the Observer Mission was to observe the preparations for the Elections and the electoral process, including the counting of the ballots, and to assess the outcome of the elections.

In carrying out those functions, the Observer Mission held discussions with the Supervisor of Elections, Government officials, representatives of political parties, representatives of civil society, including the National Monitoring and Consultative Mechanisms (NMCM), other Observer Missions and the Press. The Observer Mission also attended political rallies.

The eleven-member Observer Mission was deployed in St. Vincent, Bequia, Canouan and Union island. On Polling Day, Members of the Mission were present for the opening of the Poll at selected Polling Stations and observed the closing of the Poll and the counting of the ballots in a similar fashion.

Members of the CARICOM Electoral Observer Mission visited some 95 per cent of the 202 Polling Stations established in the fifteen Constituencies in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The Observer Mission has therefore been in a good position to properly assess the electoral process.

The Observer Mission's assessment is that the preparations for the General Elections were adequate, given the limited resources available to the Supervisor of Elections; and that such preparations were carried out to the general satisfaction of all political parties and civil society, despite concerns expressed over the omission of a few names from the Voters List.

It is our view that voters were able to cast their ballots, without intimidation or harassment, and that voting was conducted in a peaceful, free and fair manner. The voters themselves were orderly and exercised patience, while expressing good humour, in waiting their turns in the queues. In the case of the elderly and disabled voters, these persons were accorded some preference upon arrival and were treated with dignity.

The Observer Mission was impressed with the efficiency, impartiality and courtesy of the Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks, who seemed to make every effort to ensure that voters were

properly advised of the voting procedures. Generally, voting procedures were followed with minor variations and infractions; the voting process was transparent; and the secrecy of the ballot was assured and respected.

The Observer Mission was also particularly impressed with the spirit of cooperation and friendliness witnessed among the agents of the various political parties, both with each other and with the electoral officials with whom they worked closely. All party agents, with whom we spoke, expressed full satisfaction with the voting process and the counting of the ballots.

The Police Officers and para-military officers, on duty at the Polling Stations, were helpful and assisted with the organisation of queues. The Officers generally ensured the security of the Polling Stations and the peaceful and orderly conduct of the Poll.

The Observer Mission is of the view that the overall turnout of the voters was good, and that it reflects the commitment of the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines to the democratic process.

The CARICOM Electoral Observer Mission commends the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines for the maturity exhibited in ensuring that the General Elections were conducted in a peaceful manner and in an environment conducive to the free expression of the will of the voters.

A full report on the General Elections, including our findings and recommendations, will be prepared by the Electoral Mission. The report will be presented to CARICOM's Secretary-General, Mr. Edwin Carrington, for its later submission to the Conference of the Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community.

The CARICOM Electoral Observer Mission takes this opportunity to express thanks and appreciation for the cooperation and support received from the Supervisor of Elections, Government Officials, representatives of civil society and political parties, other Observer Missions and the Press.