

SOUTH AFRICAN CIVIL SOCIETY OBSERVATION COALITION



(SACSOC)

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SACSOC COMMENDS FREE AND FAIR MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

JOHANNESBURG (2 MARCH) – The South African Civil Society Observation Coalition (SACSOC) is satisfied that South Africa’s third round of municipal elections was conducted in a substantially free and fair manner.

SACSOC, an initiative coordinated by the South African Council of Churches, trained and deployed observers from a wide range of civil society organisations at polling stations in all nine provinces yesterday. Many observers were also present at political party rallies and during the counting of ballots in order to scrutinise the entire electoral process.

The Coalition is especially proud of the voters of South Africa who appear to have turned out in large numbers to exercise their civic responsibilities, notwithstanding the apparent voter boycott in Khutsong. Present projections suggest that the turnout was roughly 50%, which is relatively high by international standards for municipal elections. Voters have demonstrated a laudable degree of political maturity and have helped to ensure that an atmosphere of peace and tolerance prevailed throughout the election period. However, the fact that some voters seemed to be confused about certain details of the voting process suggests that there remains an ongoing need for voter education in all communities.

In general, political parties and their representatives conducted themselves admirably. SACSOC members remain committed to assisting parties to promote political tolerance and a vibrant culture of democracy in which all citizens are free to vote and to support the political parties of their choice.

We salute the Electoral Commission for the efficiency and transparency with which they have conducted the election. In some cases, the Commission had to deal with unexpected logistical difficulties – power cuts, flooding, withdrawal of permission to use premises for polling stations, etc. Commission staff overcame these obstacles with creativity and grace. Unfortunately, SACSOC’s observers experienced problems accessing polling stations in a few areas due to the late distribution of relevant materials, but this did not significantly impede the observation process. We will discuss these incidents with the Commission as we work together to find ways of fine tuning what has become an increasingly well-oiled electoral machinery.

Finally, SACSOC appreciates the role of the South African Police Service in co-operating with electoral officials and helping to ensure that the elections took place peacefully and with relatively few problems.

We anxiously await the completion of the counting processes around the nation and the publication of the final results. As it is our opinion that the elections were free and fair, we trust that we can count on all political parties and their members to accept the election results as the legitimate expression of the will of the people of South Africa.

SACSOC also wishes to express its appreciation to its sponsors, the Foundation for Human Rights (European Union) and the United Nations Development Programme. Without the support of these partners, we would not have been able to provide such comprehensive observation of this important election. Municipal government is at the coalface of service delivery. We trust that these elections have helped to build a foundation for accelerated and improved delivery of services, particularly to poorer households.

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