



Preliminary Remarks of the Quaker Peace Network Burundi on the Legislative Elections of 23 July 2010

President of the CENI,
Representatives of civil society organizations,
Members of the press,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The election observing team of the Quaker Peace Network (QPN) Burundi would like to bring to your attention this 26 July, and to the attention of all Burundians, the initial results of our observations of the legislative election held in Burundi on 23 July.

259 observers, including 247 national and 12 international observers (from Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States) were deployed across 13 provinces and 38 communes. The observers come from the member organizations that constitute the Quaker Peace Network. These member organizations maintain an ongoing presence of many years in communities across Burundi and work to promote peace through trauma healing, reconciliation, and community development.

QPN Burundi sees its role in observing elections as a means of promoting free, fair and transparent elections, which are in turn a crucial step towards the achievement of democracy and a vibrant, sustainable peace in Burundi.

The legislative elections are the third in a series of elections, after the communal and presidential elections. The observers of QPN noted a number of aspects that improved as compared to previous elections, but also that in some areas significant technical challenges remain. To begin with, the pre-election tension experienced in the presidential election caused by fears of violence was significantly reduced. As in the presidential election, not all political parties participated, but in contrast there were six that did compete, as well as two independent candidates. In the polling stations from which we have reports, it appears that the opening and closing hours were well respected. Finally, our initial reports indicate that the observers sent by political parties did a better job of respecting their role and staying until the minutes were completed, and they were not involved in attempting to influence the results or to see how people voted.

Some polling stations reported problems in how the polling stations counted and reported the results in the minutes, and thus for technical reasons often a small handful votes were counted

incorrectly. The staff of a number of polling stations were unclear about the difference between void (“nul”) ballots and abstentions. Finally, there were some difficulties filling out the F2 form. Observers understood these problems to be the result of a lack of capacity, and were not seen as being systematically enacted to favor one party or the other.

Based on a small sample of the observations we received, participation in the provinces we observed was around 40 percent in urban areas 60 percent in rural areas.

We conclude that the process of these legislative elections have improved in comparison with the previous (presidential and communal) elections, though they are still in need of improvement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the CENI:

Provide additional training for polling station staff. This should include:

1. Clear guidelines for filling out the F2 form and that these should be signed only after they have been fully filled out by each political party that participates in the election should send at least one observer.
2. To remind members of the police and armed forces not to bring their weapons into the polling station (Articles 53, 231).
3. Not to allow more than 10 people to vote who are not registered. If this rule hinders the effective expression of the people, the electoral code should be changed so as to reflect an alternative policy.
4. Clear procedures for counting the votes, clarifying the difference between void ballots and abstentions.

To political parties:

1. Each political party that participates in the election should send at least one observer.
2. These observers should receive additional instruction in their rights and duties, and should be aware of the need to stay until the election is completed, including the counting of all votes.

To all concerned parties, and all citizens of Burundi:

1. The Friends Church believes that there is “that of God in everyone.” Before considering the many divisions that separate us, remember that all humans were made in the image of God, regardless of political party affiliation, ethnicity, gender, or age, and thus all deserve respect and the right to express their opinions.
2. QPN Burundi sees effective communication, both good listening and the chance for all sides to be heard and considered, as a central means of responding to conflict. Parties should seek a forum for effective dialogue and mediation, and should seek to get beyond the re-statement of conflicting interests to discover what common ground can be found among all Burundians.