



**EASTERN AFRICA STANDBY FORCE (EASF)  
SHORT TERM ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION (SEOM)**

**FOR THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS OF 12<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY, 2024  
IN THE UNION OF COMOROS**

**PRELIMINARY STATEMENT  
DELIVERED BY THE HEAD OF MISSION  
HON VINCENT BAMULANGAKI SSEMPIJJA**

**MORONI, COMOROS**

**13<sup>th</sup> January, 2025**

## INTRODUCTION

1. At the invitation of the Government of the Union of Comoros, the Council of Ministers of Defense and Security of the Eastern Africa Standby Force (EASF), in accordance with EASF Guidelines on Election Observation approved the deployment of an EASF Short-Term Election Observer Mission, to observe the legislative and communal elections scheduled for 12<sup>th</sup> January and 16<sup>th</sup> February, 2025 in the Union of Comoros.

2. The Mission was led by Hon Vincent Bamulangaki Ssempijja, from the Republic of Uganda, as Head of Mission (HoM). He was assisted by Lt Gen (Rtd) Osman Nour Soubagle, of the Republic of Djibouti, Member of the Panel of Elders EASF as Special Advisor to the HoM, and by Mr. Vincent Didon, of the Republic of Seychelles, EASF Liaison Officer to the African Union, as Deputy Head of Mission (DHoM). The mission comprises 24 short-term observers drawn from EASF member states, including Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Seychelles, Somalia, Sudan, and Uganda, as well as accompanying staff.

3. EASF-SEOM comprised of 24 observers who were deployed in 11 field teams including the leadership and 1 team for the Mission Coordination Centre (MCC) as follows:

- a. 1 leadership team in Moroni area;
- b. 6 field teams in Ngazidja;
- c. 2 field teams in Ndzuwani;
- d. 2 field teams in Mwali; and
- e. 1 team at the Mission Coordination Center (MCC)

4. In this exercise, the EASF was guided by the principles and standards for the conduct of democratic elections in Africa and all relevant normative frameworks such as the OAU/AU Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections, the principles of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance and the International Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation.

5. The mission leadership held meetings and courtesy calls with various stakeholders which included the Head of State of the Union of Comoros, H.E President Azali Assoumani,

United Nations, Supreme Court, Africa Union, International Organisation of the Francophonie, La Ceni, Political Parties and Civil Society Organizations. The objective was to have a fair and objective understanding of the electoral process and the political context.

6. This preliminary statement gives an overview on the assessment of the Elections, and provides details of its observation. The Statement is based on objective, and independent assessment of the electoral process, specifically at the end of the electoral period and on the actual election day. This includes the last days of the campaigns and the management of Election Day operations, including the counting process.

### **Objectives of EASF-SEOM Mission**

7. The objectives of the EASF-SEOM were:
- a. **To enhance public confidence in the electoral process.**
  - b. **To promote the fundamental freedom and political rights of the local population in Comoros.**
  - c. **To conduct an objective assessment of the polling process.**
  - d. **To support the democratic process of the Union of Comoros.**
  - e. **To observe any situation that may lead to a political crisis that may emerge after the election.**
  - f. **To uphold EASF's Mandate in the promotion of peace and security.**

### **POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE ELECTIONS**

8. Estimated at 338,940 according to the latest revised electoral roll, voters were spread across 868 polling stations throughout the country. In March, 2024, legislation was passed to increase the number of seats to be filled in the National Assembly from 24 to 33. The purpose of this increase, was to enhance representation of the various constituencies.

9. The opposition was reported as divided with regard to its participation in the just concluded elections. A recently-formed coalition opted to boycott. Some opposition leaders

were included in the final approved list of candidates, while some were rejected by the Supreme Court, despite the fact that the Electoral Commission had pre-validated their candidacies.

10. In 2020, the Opposition opted not to take part in the legislative and communal elections, which enabled President Azali Assoumani's camp to secure a comfortable majority in the Assembly: 22 of the 24 deputies currently in Parliament belong to the Presidential Coalition.

## **ELECTORAL SYSTEM**

11. The Assembly of the Union of the Comoros is unicameral, and Members of Parliament are directly elected in a single constituency vote using the two-round system for a five-year term. The Speaker is elected from among the members of Parliament.

12. On 5<sup>th</sup> December, 2024, the Constitutional and Electoral Chamber of the Supreme Court published the final list of candidates for the elections of legislative and municipal councilors. The Court validated 107 candidates and invalidated 9 out of the 113 files submitted in the country's 33 constituencies. Among the successful candidates were seven women and some constituencies had only one candidate in the running, with no opponents.

13. Several candidates whose files had initially been rejected by Electoral Commission (CENI) had their candidacies validated by the Supreme Court. These rejections were often based on incomplete administrative files, but the Court ruled that administrative errors could not be used to invalidate candidacies when the receipt slips showed that the required documents had indeed been submitted.

14. The nine applications were rejected for a variety of reasons. The Court cited fraudulent registration on an electoral roll, absence from the local electoral roll, prolonged absence from the national territory, lack of permanent residence for a candidate who held diplomatic posts abroad until September, 2024, and inconsistency between the electoral district in which the application was registered and the electoral district in which it was submitted. Withdrawals of substitutes and administrative shortcomings, such as non-

payment of deposits or supporting documents, also led to the invalidation of other candidacies.

## **CAMPAIGNS**

15. EASF EOM observed part of the campaign rallies and noted the following
  - a. Political Rallies were held in a generally peaceful and orderly manner with high level of respect and tolerance;
  - b. Use of state resources including state provided vehicles during campaign rallies.

## **RELEVANT FINDINGS ON VOTING DAY**

16. The EASF-SEOM observers covered a total of **148** polling stations in Ngazidja, Ndzuwani and Mwali and noted that:
  - a. 80% of the polling stations visited had party agents present;
  - b. 90% of the polling stations visited at opening counted and verified the election materials;
  - c. The ballot boxes were sealed in front of those present in 87% of the polling stations visited.
  - d. 91% of the polling station were opened as per the established guidelines;
  - e. Voting started late in 75% of the polling stations visited by EASF-SEOM;
  - f. Three polling stations observed received wrong ballots papers which delayed the starting time for voting;
  - g. 39 domestic observers and 12 international observers were seen in polling stations observed by the mission;
  - h. 8% of the polling stations visited still had candidates campaign posters displayed as well as on cars;
  - i. In one polling station, the number of votes cast were more than the voters registered;
  - j. 113 voters were turned away from the polling station because they did not have their identity card or did not appear in the voter register;

- k. Two of the polling stations observed closed earlier than the appointed closing time which was 4 pm;
- l. A communique was issued by CENI just before 4 pm that polling stations should extend their closing time to 6pm, however, this was not communicated in advance and most presiding officers were not aware and closed at the stipulated time of 4 pm;
- m. In two polling stations visited, ballot papers were plucked out before voters arrived to vote;
- n. In one polling station, there was interference by an opposition candidate who was witnessed advising voters to disregard the rule of the secret ballot;
- o. In one polling station, a polling staff and a party agent of an independent candidate stopped someone from stuffing ballot papers into a ballot box. Chaos erupted and the gendarmerie interrupted to get statements;

#### **VOTING PROCEDURES IN POLLING STATIONS**

17. The EASF Short Term Election Observer Mission was conducted in accordance with the legal framework of the Union of Comoros. The secrecy of the vote was not observed in 13% of the polling stations visited. The prior verification of voters in the polling station's lists was systematically done by electoral staff and witnessed by the Mission.

18. The use of indelible ink to mark fingers after voting was observed in all polling stations. However, in a number of the polling stations there was no verification of the indelible ink mark prior to voting.

#### **SECURITY**

19. The Military and Gendamarie Forces demonstrated discretion and professionalism on Election Day. EASF observers didn't record any hindrance or interference to the voting process.

20. There were sufficient number of police personnel in the polling stations visited.

#### **ASSISTANCE TO PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY, PREGNANT OR BREASTFEEDING WOMEN AND THE ELDERLY**

21. For voters living with disability or reduced mobility, as well as the elderly, pregnant, or breastfeeding women, a person of their choice provided assistance and they were given priority in the polling stations observed by the Mission. 67% of the polling stations were not accessible to persons with disabilities. In addition, the EASF-EOM could not ascertain the existence of ballot in Braille for the visually impaired in all polling stations.

#### **PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN AND YOUTH IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS**

22. Women and youth were well mobilized on the day of the vote. Given that they constitute the majority of the electorate, they were well represented in the polling station as election staff, in the exercise of their civil and political rights and during counting.

23. The Mission noted that there were women candidates contesting. In addition, the Mission met 223 women among the electoral staff in the polling stations visited.

#### **CIVIL SOCIETY**

24. The Civil Society plays an important role in an electoral process. EASF-SEOM observed the presence of 39 domestic observers in polling stations visited.

#### **MEDIA**

25. The Comorian media landscape is difficult to classify, and an inventory of its various elements would be summed up by mentioning the major press houses and a few influential media, in addition to social media networks. In fact, the Comorian media is made up of the written press, radio, television and, more recently, Web 2.0, whose influence is growing by

the day.

26. Each of these media elements are organized into subdivisions, due to the island nature of the country, so as to respond to the increasing demands of the public. The archipelago's community organization also calls for media that inform and involve the local population, especially on the radio.

#### **GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

27. The EASF-EOM recommends the following:

- a. Urge all stakeholders to take note of the objectives and findings to improve future electoral processes in Comoros;
- b. Encourage participation in dialogue and Electoral processes that are instituted in order to promote democracy and national cohesion;
- c. Encourages the promotion of civic education in support of efforts already in place.

#### **CONCLUSION**

28. Based on its overall observations and findings, the EASF-SEOM concluded that the electoral process took place in an orderly, calm and peaceful manner.

**Done at Moroni, 13<sup>th</sup> January, 2025**

**For the Mission**

**Hon Vincent Bamulangaki Ssempijja**

**Head of Mission**