



**PROMOTING STATESMANSHIP
AMONG POLITICAL STAKEHOLDERS
FOR FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS
IN 2006**

**Presentation By
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The National Coordinator,
Democracy Monitoring Group (DEMGROUP),
All Invited Dignitaries in Different Capacities
Ladies & Gentlemen

1.0 INTRODUCTION

First of all, I would like to thank the organisers of the workshop for the timeliness in addressing the theme of the day, that is “Promoting Statesmanship among Political Stakeholders for Free and Fair Elections in 2006”. This theme is appropriate especially as Uganda is in the process of transition which was spearheaded by the 28th July 2005 Referendum on Change of the Political System. The transition is yet to culminate into general elections of 2006, which will be under a multiparty political system of governance as chosen by Ugandans through the 2005 Referendum.

You will agree with me that statesmanship in Uganda will only be made so by us the individual Ugandans who desire to have peaceful co-existence born by democratic principles. This improved living to a certain extent can only be attained through exercising one’s human right to select good leadership and good systems of governance through the power of the ballot. Being the public eye therefore, the media must in this critical time, be extra helpful and report responsibly on any occurrences that will contribute to the attainment of what every Ugandan desires through this transitional period.

On its part, the Electoral Commission as mandated under Article 61 of the 1995 Constitution of Uganda, is to undertake the following duties in a bid to promote democracy:-

- (a) Ensure that regular, free and fair elections/referenda are held;
- (b) Organize, conduct and supervise elections and referenda;
- (c) Demarcate constituencies;
- (d) Ascertain, publish and declare in writing, under seal the results of the elections and referenda; to compile, maintain, revise and up-date the voters’ registers;

- (e) Hear and determine election complaints arising before and during polling;
- (f) Formulate and implement civic educational programmes relating to elections, and;
- (g) Perform such other functions as may be prescribed by law.

2.0 MEASURES FOR PROMOTING DEMOCRACY AND STATESMANSHIP AMONGST STAKEHOLDERS OF THE 2006 ELECTIONS

2.1 Respect for Human Rights

This principle demands for respect of human rights so that individuals i.e. the voters, parties and candidates are able to participate in the election without coercion or restriction and are accorded equal access to opportunities available to them in order to contest for electoral positions.

The principle further requires that a legislative framework that will create favorable socio-political conditions under which the democratization process can thrive and seeks to guarantee the freedom of all persons to engage in constructive debates, express opinion on the conduct and in the case of dissatisfaction, seek redress through the courts of law. Security organs particularly the Police should as always, ensure law and order during the electoral environment for the good of all.

2.2 Transparency

The principle of transparency in elections demands that there exists a competent, honest and non-partisan election management body (EMB) to ensure a credible electoral process. At the same time, it demands that the EMB, electorate, candidates, candidate agents, security agents etc. reciprocate by complying with the laws and guidelines governing the elections and ensure that the secrecy of the vote is upheld and transparently declared.

2.3 Integrity

The principle of integrity demands for honesty and reliability on the part of every stakeholder and also sets the same standards for the electorate through their actions.

2.4 Accountability

The principle of accountability demands that every stakeholder should be in position to take full responsibility for all actions undertaken. The electorate should also be satisfied that they have exercised their right to make a choice. Similarly, all those who may not have exercised their

human rights in an election through either boycott or non-participation, should contend with the final decision of those who took the trouble to participate.

2.5 Electoral Sensitisation

Regarding electoral democracy, voter education/sensitisation is the informal yet deliberate effort to impart information to the public with greatest efforts directed to eligible voters, information regarding their rights, duties and obligations as well as the skills on how to manage the democratisation process on any coming election or by-election, freely and fairly. The objective of voter education is to establish and sustain good governance from informed positions, in line with Article 1 of the 1995 Constitution of Uganda which vests all power in the hands of the people of Uganda.

The Commission has the challenge to make voter education “all inclusive” given the several tribal and lingual set-ups in the country. One of the challenges that must be addressed by stakeholders like Government and the Executive, particularly in the coming elections of 2006, is the prohibitive costs, which would be required to implement appropriate voter education programmes countrywide.

Given adequate funding by Government, the Commission would carry out continuous voter education/sensitisation through all the available media channels and would also engage various Civil Society Organisations to assist it in disseminating information to the public on what to expect.

Through continuous sensitisation on electoral related issues, there is hope for enhanced participation, transparency, accountability to the people, candidates learn to concede defeat and thus minimise post electoral violence and suffering and thus promotion of tolerance and peaceful co-existence. There is reduced commercialisation of the elections and corruption due to continuous sensitisation. All this translates into forward democratic development and prosperity of the country at large.

2.6 A Credible Voters’ Register

An accurate voters’ register is a key requirement in any election. There seems to be a false belief that rigging of elections begins on polling day. The Electoral Commission is aware however, that there are attempts at rigging at all stages of an election for instance, during the update period, during the display of the voters’ register where recommendations that certain persons are dead or left the area and are authenticated by tribunals

for deletion by the Commission when actually some of those eligible voters are alive. The Commission therefore calls upon all stakeholders especially the media, to help in carrying the message to the public on the coming national display of the voters' register to assist in perfecting its correctness and credibility.

2.7 Curbing of Election Violence

In order to eliminate violence during elections, the enthusiastic and informed participation of the electorate and other members of the public is very important, since they are always involved either as the targets or the victims. Wherever election violence occurs, the result is always loss life, property, disruption in development and eventual loss of faith in the electoral process. I therefore appeal for tolerance of individual opinions e.g. during campaign periods, on polling day and post polling days. I further appeal to those individuals who may not participate in the coming elections for one reason or another, to limit their participation to observation without undue interference in the electoral process.

The challenge for all players is to raise the political debates above petty issues to wider views that enhance general awareness for peaceful democratic developments at all levels. With improved debate and an informed electorate, the elections will portray a positive image of the country as democratically progressive and politically mature.

It is important that the electorate identify and support only those persons who qualify to stand as candidates and are foresighted and capable of promoting democratic representation and governance. With the necessary evidence, any unsatisfied stakeholder should be capable of challenging the nominated candidates before polls or contest the suitability of an elected candidate after the polls by petitioning through court other than resorting to other means of violence.

3.0 CONCLUSION

One of the critical variables for the success or failure of democracy is the administration of elections and referenda. In developing countries with low levels of literacy, administration of elections/referenda is not an easy task. Like in all other competitive ventures, there must be winners and losers.

Therefore, it is of paramount importance that all stakeholders exercise tolerance, adhere to democratic procedures to solve conflicts and learn to accept the verdict of the ballot/polls or seek redress in courts of law instead of resorting to violent and disruptive means.

The Electoral Commission will continuously endeavour to ensure transparency, accountability and impartiality at every stage of the electoral process so that the stakeholders can have trust and confidence in the processes. The Commission will only achieve this by building lasting good working relationships and cooperation of all stakeholders.

I once again thank DemGroup for its continued good working relationship with the Electoral Commission and for this opportunity to be here today to share ideas in this important Dialogue that will greatly shape actions of different stakeholders as the 2006 general elections period approaches.

I now declare this media dialogue open.

For God and My Country

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CHAIRMAN, ELECTORAL COMMISSION