



## REPORT ON RWANDA PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS HELD BETWEEN THE 29<sup>th</sup> OF SEPTEMBER AND THE 2<sup>nd</sup> OCTOBER 2003.

### 1.0 Introduction

The Electoral Commission of Uganda was invited by the National Electoral Commission-Rwanda to observe parliamentary elections conducted between September 29<sup>th</sup> and October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2003.

The delegation was lead by Commissioner Joseph Biribonwa included Charles Nsimbi, Ag. Head/Voter Registration department and Denis Ebong, District Registrar/Lira district.

We would like to thank the Electoral Commission for nominating us to join the team of International observers. Indeed it was an important experience that will hopefully be beneficial to the whole commission.

We are also grateful to National Electoral Commission of Rwanda for inviting us to observe their parliamentary elections and for all the facilitation they accorded us.

### 2.0 Arrival and Accreditation

The delegation arrived in Kigali on the afternoon of 28<sup>th</sup> September 2003 and was received by an official from the National Electoral Commission who cleared the team through customs. The delegation proceeded to the hotel where they had already been booked to check-in. The team was then taken to the Commission headquarters for accreditation. This was done in a one stop center where an observer's kit was issued to each member. This kit contained the following items,

- i) Map of Rwanda
- ii) Accreditation letter and badge with the name and organization already pre-printed.
- iii) Spiral bound packing list of Rwanda.
- iv) Law governing the elections
- v) Guidelines for observers and agenda for observation with contact persons and telephone numbers.

The delegation was also equipped with two fully fueled each with a driver and a guide/interpreter. According to the agenda, Commissioner Joseph Biribonwa was assigned Gisenyi province and Charles Nsimbi and Denis Ebong were assigned Umutara province.

### 3.0 Polling Eve, 29<sup>th</sup> September 2003

This was the Election Day for two youth Members of Parliament and one Member of Parliament for persons with disabilities. These were elected by National Youth Council and the federation of Associations of the disabled respectively in one ballot and on a majority basis. Commissioner Joseph Biribonwa witnessed the former election that took place at National Academy.

It should be noted that Article 84, Sect II of the Organic Law governing the election has a provision that states " If the 2/3 quorum is not available on the second attempt, the election is carried out by those who are present."

The second team traveled to Umutara province near the Ugandan border to observe preparations on polling eve. It was discovered that there was little activity since all the materials had already been distributed. The ballot boxes, which are made out of plywood, are made locally in the districts. Consequently, the electoral Commission only sends ballot papers and registers to the provincial Commissioner who then distributes these, together with re-usables to the district chairs.



Zagnissa Pierre Boro (Vice-Chair Burkina Fasso EC) 2<sup>nd</sup> left, Rossienne Kamarho (Burkina Fasso EC) centre, Speciose Nyiraneza (Deputy Executive Secretary NEC-Rwanda) 2<sup>nd</sup> right and Denis Ebong (EC-Uganda) outside the Provincial Office Umutara-Rwanda

The Provincial office has one permanent employee, the President or Chairperson, who is equipped with all facilities including both a mobile phone and a landline, a fax, computer and printer, a double cabin pick-up truck with a driver and a secretary. The president works with three other temporary officials in charge of logistics, finance and documentation/civic education. This structure is replicated at district and sector levels were, however all officials are temporary.

It should be noted that on polling eve, there was no noticeable panic and an atmosphere of calm was prevalent. This can be attributed to the system were only a few materials are distributed from the centre.

#### **4.0 Polling Day, 30<sup>th</sup> September 2003**

##### **i) Polling Centre and Procedure.**

The delegation was able to observe elections in Kigali City, Kigali-Ngali, Umutara and Gisenyi provinces. Poling started at 6.00am and closed at 3.00 pm and counting of votes commenced at 4.00 pm.

Most polling centres are situated in schools and cater for the whole sector (parish). There are Chambers/rooms for each village to vote from and if a village has more than 600 voters, it is split into two alphabetically.

Each polling centre is under the supervision of a Chairman/President and each room is under the supervision of a Co-ordinator with the help of three assistants. An armed police constable guards the centre.

The set up of the polling station is similar to that of Uganda except there is a polling booth as opposed to the basin.

It is important to note that all the polling officials are nominated by their communities and work on a voluntary basis.

##### **ii) Counting of Votes and Transmission of Results.**

This is done immediately after polls. There is an innovation of the **Score Card** which enables the counting to be done quickly and accurately. It is the various scorecards that are signed and endorsed by the room electoral officials and the candidates' agents and forwarded to the polling centre president. The later then tallies the results of the centre and signs the declaration forms which he sends to the sector president for onward transmission to the district president and on to the provincial Chairman. The provincial Chairman, after verifying the results faxes the provincial tally to the National Electoral Commission headquarters.

#### **5.0 Declaration of Results, 1<sup>st</sup> October 2003**

Partial results from 5 of the 12 provinces were announced at 12.45 pm by the Chairman of the National Electoral Commission at a press conference. The remaining results were to be announced later in the afternoon. The delegation was invited to the press conference and also had the opportunity to meet the Chairman, a Commissioner and the Executive Secretary of N.E.C-Rwanda.



N.E.C-Rwanda Commissioner..... Chairman Karangwa and Executive Secretary ..... announcing results from the polls.

## 6.0 Observations

- i) There is a high level of patriotism because all polling officials were volunteers.
- ii) All polling officials were wearing a uniform distinguishing them from ordinary voters. On top of this there was additional identification in form of tags.
- iii) The availability of a national identity card makes registration and identification of voters very easy. On polling day there are three documents to use, the voters' register, the national ID. and the voter's card which is stamped to show that the individual has voted. Each register is individually endorsed and stamped by the chairman of the National Electoral Commission.
- iv) During voting all voters thumb print the ballot paper which reduces the occurrence of invalid votes. The ink used is fast drying similar to that used for the PVRIS project. The ballot papers are not serialised.
- v) The ballot paper has symbols of parties and those of independent candidates and is the same through out the country. Voting is for the party and not individuals. Therefore, there are no

constituencies and electoral petitions are very difficult to launch. This implies that there will not be any by-elections. This enables the National Electoral Commission to be temporary because it is only needed after five years.

- vi) The organic law governing the elections is very simple and gives the National Electoral Commission very wide latitude in operations. For instance, periods for displaying of the register and for issuance of voter cards are left to the discretion of N.E.C.
- vii) The National Electoral Commission of Rwanda is composed of a Chairman and four Commissioners. Below these is the Executive Secretary with five deputies in charge of Electoral Operations, Public Relations & Documentation, Legal, Civic Education and Finance and Administration departments.



Commissioner Joseph Biribonwa (left) with Chairman N.E.C- Rwanda Prof. Dr. Chrysologue Karangwa at the press conference

## **7.0 Recommendations**

- a) The Electoral Commission should urge the government to issue national Identity cards. This can be done starting with the 8.2 million records of Ugandan citizen over the age of 18 that are in the Commission database.
- b) Decentralising some of the functions like registration, packing of polling kits and tallying of results should be encouraged.
- c) The commission should explore the use of a score card to simplify vote counting. The idea of everybody using the thumbprint on the ballot paper is certainly useful in reducing the number of invalid votes.
- d) The Commission should look into the possibility of amending the law to remove unnecessary restrictions especially in operational areas that can be affected by various circumstances.

## **7.0 Conclusion**

The delegation was not able to stay for the final declaration of results and the final part of the elections, i.e election the 23 women members of parliament. The delegation is, however, confident that the results reflected the will of the voters. The delegation observes that the elections were carried in accordance with the electoral laws of Rwanda.