

GHANA CENTER FOR DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT (CDD-GHANA)

STATEMENT ON THE ODODODIODOO CONSTITUENCY BYE-ELECTION

ON AUGUST 30, 2005

INTRODUCTION

The Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) deployed a ten-member team of observers for the 30th August bye-election in the Odododiodoo constituency. The Center also conducted three weeks of pre-election monitoring of activities leading up to the bye-election. This statement covers the observations by CDD monitors on Election Day and the three weeks of pre-election monitoring.

PRE-ELECTION POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

The Center deployed four people with experience in pre-election monitoring to monitor the following activities and developments:

- Voter education
- Party rallies
- Activities of principal political actors, party officials and activists
- Political demonstrations and protests
- Internal party developments
- The general political atmosphere in the constituency
- Activities of important political/electoral agencies such as the NCCE and the EC
- Possible abuse of incumbency

General Observation

Generally, the monitors observed that the NDC and NPP dominated the political scene in the constituency prior to polling day. The monitors reported that party flags and posters of candidates of these two parties could be seen all over the constituency. The CPP and DPP posters were also on display in the constituency, but not as much those of the NDC and NPP.

Voter Education

There was limited voter education by the Electoral Commission (EC) and the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) on the bye-election. According to the monitors, much of the voter and civic education on the bye-election was undertaken by the political parties at their respective campaign rallies. Leading members of the contesting political parties took it upon themselves to explain to the electorate the essence of the bye-election and the need for them to locate their voter identification cards ahead of the voting day. The EC had posters all over the constituency to announce the upcoming bye-election as well as posters showing the placement of the candidates on the ballot papers.

Party rallies/Violent incidents

Three weeks to the polls saw a surge in political activities in the constituency. All contesting candidates organised rallies to outline their programs and canvass for votes. The monitors reported that most of the rallies were heavily patronised with an average attendance of about 600 people at each rally. Though the rallies were generally peaceful, a number of violent confrontations were recorded, most of them occurring after the close of the rallies.

Reported cases of violence and rowdy behavior included a clash between NPP and NDC supporters in Bukom after an NDC rally at Bombay Street; a confrontation between CPP supporters at the Timber Market over which of the candidates was likely to win the elections; and the disruption of the town hall meeting organized by the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA).

Tension started mounting in the constituency following these violent confrontations and was significantly aggravated by utterances made by key political figures at some campaign rallies. Leading members of both the NPP and NDC parties exhorted their supporters to match their opponents *boot-for-boot*. It must be noted here that these acts of violence do not augur well for Ghana's young democracy as they have the potential to create more divisions and tensions and can undermine the commendable successes chalked so far.

Incidence of Abuse of Incumbency

The pre-election period saw the initiation of a number of 'development projects' in the constituency. CDD monitors observed streetlights being mounted, roads being tarred and medical screening being undertaken in parts of the constituency. However, they could not determine whether the projects were deliberately carried out to garner votes for the ruling party. Indeed, some residents of the affected areas insisted that the projects commenced only when campaigns began in the area.

ELECTION DAY OBSERVATION

CDD's Election Day observation focused on the conduct of the polls. Observers monitored the preparedness of the EC, availability of election materials, the voting procedure, security and the conduct of the election in general and the conduct of party officials.

Main Highlights

- The atmosphere in most polling stations was calm and relaxed
- Voting was very smooth in most polling stations. The counting, collation and declaration of results was very smooth
- Voter turnout was rather low. The bye-election recorded about 57 per cent turnout as against 83 per cent recorded in the December 7, 2004 general elections. The low turnout was largely attributed to voter apathy and the heavy presence of the security personnel
- There were few cases of rowdy behaviour but these were quickly controlled by the peace officers and leading members of the contesting political parties.
- Overall the conduct of the bye-elections was fair but not entirely free of fear as the heavy presence of police personnel was alleged to have intimidated some voters.

The Electoral Commission

The EC deserves commendation for the able manner in which they handled the bye-election. The polls were opened on schedule in nearly all polling stations and election officials and materials were available throughout the day. The professional and timely intervention of the EC and the police at the Palladium Cinema polling station averted a clash between supporters of the NDC and NPP.

Electoral integrity

Election officials conducted themselves professionally. There was also very cordial interaction between election officials, political party agents and the independent observers.

Security

The security personnel deserve commendation for the professional manner in which they handled some of the potentially violent confrontations. It was however observed that the use of sirens by the patrol teams and the presence of armoured cars created some tension in the constituency.

Malpractices

The observers did not record any major electoral malpractice or irregularities. They also found the allegations of stuffed ballot boxes in the NPP constituency office to be untrue.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The Ododiodoo bye-election of August 30, 2005 was peaceful and fair but not entirely free of fear.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The rising level of political intolerance in our electoral process is cause for concern. The phenomenon does not only cost the nation in terms of resources used to maintain peace, it also has the potential to taint our democratic dispensation. CDD appeals to political parties to continue to inculcate the value of political tolerance in their supporters.
- Civic education is still under-utilized in our electoral process. CDD calls on all civic educators including the NCCE, the EC, political parties and the media to be active and more proactive in their approach to civic education.
- The excessive deployment of security personnel, and in particular, armed personnel, is a cause for concern. The Center recommends that the security agencies limit or entirely avoid the use of armoured vehicles and sirens during elections.

CONCLUSION

The Center congratulates all political parties, the candidates, the EC, the security agencies, the media and the people of Odododiodoo for the successful and peaceful conduct of the bye-election. Congratulations to the NDC for retaining the Odododiodoo seat and we wish the other candidates the best of luck next time.

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