



Melanesian solidarity... our future



MELANESIAN SPEARHEAD GROUP OBSERVER GROUP (MSGOG)

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT ON 2020 VANUATU NATIONAL GENERAL ELECTION

27 MARCH 2020

This Preliminary Statement is issued to provide a summary of our observation. Our final detailed report and recommendations will be released at a later date.

The Melanesian Spearhead Group Observer Group (MSGOG), on the invitation of the Government, has been in the Republic of Vanuatu, since 17 March 2020 to observe the National General Elections. The MSGOG was led by Ratu Inoke Kubuabola and comprised of representatives from the MSG Membership. The group was assisted by staff of the MSG Secretariat under the leadership of the Director General, Ambassador Amena Yauvoli.

Given our overall size – 8 in all- the MSG could only deploy four teams to observe polling in Efate Islands, Tanna Island, Malekula Island and Santo Island. The MSGOG is pleased to have participated in an important political exercise that further affirms Vanuatu Government's adherence to democracy and the underlying principle of governing through a mandate from the people. The MSG Observer teams were able to observe the elections in some remote places across the country and were privileged to have done so cognizant of the fact that most of the international observers invited by the Vanuatu Government to

observe the election had withdrawn their observers due to the ongoing challenges posed by COVID-19. This demonstrates MSG's strong commitment through the leadership of the Director General, to support Members' strengthening their respective internal electoral processes.

During the course of the MSGOG observation, our observers were given unhindered access to polling stations, able to interact freely with polling officials, political party agents/observers, security personnel as well as the other election observers. Our teams were also able to monitor coverage of other areas of polling in the constituencies they were in by following news reports and social media posts. This enabled us to obtain a broad view of the election process and its management as well as help inform the way we carried out our observation tasks, but always strictly adhering to the Code of Conduct provided by the Vanuatu Electoral Commission (VEC) and to which we subscribed.

The MSGOG congratulates the people of Vanuatu for exercising their democratic right by participating in the 2020 National General Elections. During the visits of our teams to the different polling stations in the Constituencies we covered, we witnessed firsthand the peaceful, courteous and free manner in which the voters conducted themselves during polling. Strong expressions were generally conveyed by citizens of their genuine desire to be continually governed by a democratically elected government that would bring about good political changes, further economic development and deliver basic health, education and social services to the people.

Based on our observations, in our assessment, while the 2020 Vanuatu National General Elections were welcomed and embraced by citizens, some administrative and logistical issues continued to pose challenges for polling officials and electoral staff. The specifics will be covered in our detailed final report, but suffice to mention here that they relate to the cleaning up of the electoral roll, safe and early transportation of ballot boxes, comprehensive educational awareness of voters' rights and voting processes, thorough training to familiarise all presiding officials and polling officials with the voting processes and electoral laws, rights and responsibilities of political party observers/agents, standardisation of the set-up of polling stations, consistency in the administration of the voting process, and improving the counting system.

Despite the challenges, we are pleased to note that the polling stations visited by the MSGOG were manned by committed polling officials and security personnel who performed their duties as best they could and we commend them for their commitment

We acknowledge that the official results are yet to be announced, and hope that counting for the remaining polling boxes can be completed soon so that the results can be made known to the people of Vanuatu sooner than later. We are confident that the people of Vanuatu, having had the opportunity to participate in the election process, will embrace whoever or whatever political parties constitute their future government.

The MSG Leaders had agreed in the MSG Agreement and in the MSG 2038 “Prosperity for All Plan” for the Members to work closely to strengthen our national and sub-regional cooperation not only in people to people relationships, trade and investment but in the area of good governance and strengthening of democratic processes for the well-being of our nations and citizens.

On behalf of the MSG Observer Group, we would like to thank the Government of Vanuatu for the honour of inviting us to participate in the important political process as Observers. We thank our respective Governments for the trust placed upon us to undertake this Observer Mission and for their commitment to upholding the prevalence of democratic principles in Melanesia.

God bless the Government and the People of Vanuatu!

Ratu Inoke Kubuabola
Team Leader
MSG Observer Group