



**Statement by the Coalition of Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations for Elections (CECOE)
on the Commencement of the Referendum Day Voting process in the Six zones and Five
special Woredas under the SNNPR region of Ethiopia**

*Monday, February 6, 2023
Addis Ababa*

The Coalition of Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations for Elections (CECOE) recruited, trained and deployed 434 stationary and 76 mobile observers, in the six zones (Konso, South Omo, Wolayta, Gamo, Gedeo, Gofa) and the five special Woredas (Burji, Basketo, Ale, Amaro, Derashe) of the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region where referendum voting is taking place today. CECOIE's stationary observers arrived at their assigned polling stations starting from 5:00 am. The stationary observers are expected to observe all the election processes at their assigned polling station until the results are announced while the mobile observers will be visiting a number of polling stations to observe the processes. The main objective of observing the referendum is to contribute to enhanced transparency and accountability of the SNNPR referendum and providing systematic and factual objective information on the conduct of the electoral process in the referendum.

By the time of the release of this preliminary statement, 415 of trained and accredited stationary observers had sent their observation findings to the CECOIE's Referendum Day Situation Room using the observation checklist they are provided with. Due to poor network connectivity in some areas, there will be more messages reaching CECOIE's situation room and their information will be analyzed together with the other information on the referendum process.

This preliminary statement is based on information collected from 415 stationary observers until 1:00 PM. This preliminary statement captures information collected on the arrival of observers at polling stations, and opening of polling stations.

- CECOIE deployed 415 observers to observe the opening of polling stations and out of these observers 97% of them reported that polling station officials were present when they arrived at polling stations at 5:00 AM.
- Out of 415 stationary observers who reported, 412 of them have confirmed that they were allowed to enter polling stations, except one observer who was denied but later allowed to enter his assigned polling station following corrective measures taken by the polling station officials.



- 406 (98%) observers reported that there were no campaigns or campaign materials within 200 meters proximity to the polling stations. However, in 8 (2%) of the polling stations, campaigns and campaign materials were observed contrary to the electoral law.
- Out of 413 observers who sent reports on the commencement of voting, 363 (88%) of them reported that the voting process started between 6:00 am and 9:00 am. However, observers reported that 50 (12%) polling stations that were observed were opened before 6:00 am.
- 411 (99%) observers reported that the polling stations they observed were established in places permitted under the electoral law except in one instance which occurred in the South Omo Zone, Jinka town where a polling station (Tenadam 1 Polling station) was established in a private residence.
- In relation to accessibility of polling stations, out of 403 reports, 385 (96%) of them indicate that persons with disabilities (PWDs) or mobility challenges could enter the polling station without requiring assistance. However, 17 (4%) of the reports have indicated that polling stations were not convenient.
- Out of 403 observers, 396 (98%) of them reported that polling stations were equally accessible to both men and women.
- Regarding availability of electoral materials in polling stations, reports from 403 observers indicated that ballot papers, electoral roll, NEBE official stamps, indelible ink, official ballot box and ballot box seals were present. However, 2 observers reported that in polling stations they observed, there were no results and reconciliation forms.
- With regards to polling station officials, 403 observers reported that on average 4 NEBE polling officials were present in polling stations. From 403 observers reports, on average there were 2 women polling station officials. Of these, it was indicated that 94 (23%) of polling stations observed have women chairpersons.

At the time of preparation of this preliminary statement, CECOIE has received 13 critical incidents which contradict the existing electoral law. Of these, Six incidents reported from Amaro, Gamo, Gofa and South Omo areas have been verified and confirmed. Among the incidents that were repeatedly reported, unavailability of results and reconciliation forms in two polling stations. Moreover, presence of unauthorized persons in polling stations and opening of one polling station in prohibited areas were reported.

CECOIE continues receiving and verifying observation reports of additional information and critical incidents. Moreover, CECOIE's Referendum Day Situation Room is providing information to the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) on matters that require its immediate attention and expedited intervention. CECOIE will issue a comprehensive **South Ethiopia Referendum**



Observation Statement after it has verified, analyzed and synthesized observation data once voting and counting procedures have been completed. CECOIE is cognizant that it is not possible to reach any conclusion without receiving and verifying the remaining information received.

The Coalition of Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations for Elections calls on citizens to wait calmly and patiently until the completion of the voting and counting process.

*Monday, February 6, 2023
Addis Ababa*

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