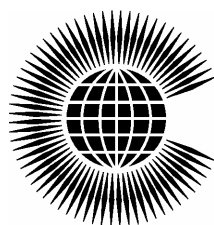


Belize General Election

7 February 2008

REPORT OF THE COMMONWEALTH EXPERT TEAM



Commonwealth Secretariat

Contents

	Page
Letter of Transmittal.....	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: Political Background.....	2
Chapter Three: Electoral Framework and the Environment	3
Chapter Four: The Campaign.....	6
Chapter Five: The Poll, Count and Results Process	7
Chapter Six: Conclusions and Recommendations	11
 Annexes	
Annex 1 List of Meetings Held.....	13
Annex 2 Composition of the Commonwealth Expert Team.....	14

MAP

COMMONWEALTH EXPERT TEAM
Belize General Election 2008

12 February 2008

Dear Secretary-General,

Following your invitation to observe the Belize General Election on 7 February 2008, we are submitting our report to you.

We have set out our conclusions and recommendations at the end of this report. We place on record our profound gratitude to the Secretariat staff. Juliet, Julie and Madonna for their display of professionalism in the conduct of their duties and their caring dispositions towards us. Without them we will never have dreamt of achieving our mandate.

We thank you for the opportunity to participate in this important process in Belize and hope that our involvement was of some value to the people of this fascinating country.

Yours sincerely,

Mr K D Knight

Dr Nemata Eshun-Baiden

Mr Robert Patterson

Rt Hon Don McKinnon
Commonwealth Secretary-General
Marlborough House
Pall Mall
London SW1Y 5HX
United Kingdom

Acknowledgements

The team would like to thank the Government of Belize for the invitation to observe the General Election and the cooperation and assistance extended to us by the Election and Boundaries Commission and the Election and Boundaries Department.

We extend our sincere thanks to all who met with us. In all of our meetings we were impressed with the candid discussions that were held. Throughout our work we have been warmly received by the people of Belize and we would like to express our appreciation and congratulate them on their vigorous and good humoured commitment to democracy which we witnessed daily during our time in their country.

We would also like to put on record thanks to our drivers whose local knowledge and stamina on polling day were invaluable.

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Following an invitation from the Government of Belize on 7 January 2008 requesting Commonwealth Observers for the Belize General Election, the Commonwealth Secretary-General constituted a Commonwealth Expert Team comprised of three experts. The Team was supported by three officers from the Commonwealth Secretariat. The members of the Expert Team were as follows:

Senator K D Knight, Former Foreign Minister of Jamaica

Dr Mrs Nemata Eshun-Baiden, Founding Member and Former President of 50/50 Group, Sierra Leone

Mr Robert Patterson

Former Chief Electoral Officer, British Columbia, Canada

The Team was assisted by Ms Juliet Solomon, Ms Julie Broadbent and Mrs Madonna Lynch from the Political Affairs Division

Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference as defined by the Secretary-General were as follows:

The Commonwealth Expert Team for the Belize General Election shall observe the preparations for the election; the polling, counting and results process; and the overall electoral environment.

Activities of the Team

The Team arrived in Belize City and commenced work on 1 February 2008. Following its arrival in Belize, the Team received briefings from the Elections and Boundaries Commission, the Elections and Boundaries Department, political parties, non-governmental organisations, representatives of the Diplomatic Community, and other international organisations on issues relevant to the General Election. In addition to these meetings the Team studied documentation from various sources. (See Annex one for a list of meetings held).

On 6 February 2008, the Team deployed to four locations throughout Belize and covered all six districts. These were:

- Cayo (Mr K D Knight, CHAIR and Ms Juliet Solomon)
- Belize (City and Rural) (Ms Julie Broadbent)
- Corozal and Orange Walk (Dr Nemata Eshun-Baiden and Mrs Madonna Lynch)
- Stann Creek and Toledo (Mr Robert Patterson)

After observing administrative and political preparations prior to polling and the voting and counting processes in the districts mentioned above, the Team reconvened in Belize City, prepared their report and departed on 12 February 2008.

Chapter Two

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

The only officially English-speaking country in Central America, Belize is bordered by Mexico to the north and by Guatemala to the west and south. Spanish is also widely spoken. Known as British Honduras until 1973, the country gained independence from Britain in 1981. Belize is a parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy which recognizes Queen Elizabeth II as Head of State, represented by a Governor-General. The bicameral legislature, the National Assembly, is composed of a 12 member appointed Senate and, until recently, a 29 member House of Representatives directly elected every five years under universal adult suffrage by the first-past-the-post system. 'Redistricting' before the 2008 general Election created two more constituencies bringing the total number of seats in the House of Representatives to 31.

Belize has six administrative districts administered, with the exception of Belize City, by locally elected seven-member town boards. Belize City is administered by a city council of nine elected members. The head of government is the Prime Minister, who in the parliamentary system commands a majority in the legislature.

The genesis of party politics in Belize was the formation of the People's United Party (PUP) in 1950. It won the first election contested after universal adult suffrage was introduced in 1954. Belize achieved internal self-government in 1964 and complete independence on 21 September 1981. The PUP, led by George Price, dominated politics for 30 years, until the United Democratic Party (UDP), formed by a coalition of small opposition parties in 1973, won the 1984 election under the leadership of Manuel Esquivel. Politics in Belize has since been dominated by these two parties, though the 2008 election saw three relatively new parties contesting.

From independence to 2003, no party was able to secure consecutive victories at the polls. The PUP won the August 1998 Election with 60% of the popular vote, winning 26 of the 29 seats in the House of Representatives, with UDP controlling the remainder. Voter turnout was estimated at over 90%, the highest in the country's history. Said Musa, the party leader, became the nation's third Prime Minister. Musa and the PUP were returned to power in the March 2003 election when they took 22 seats to the UDP's seven with 53% of the vote.

In the course of their second term, the Government has been plagued by accusations of corruption and fiscal mismanagement and came under increasing pressure in the face of large budget deficits, and a dramatically increasing national debt.

Civil unrest broke out in the capital city of Belmopan during mid-January 2005 and continued sporadically for several months. The initial unrest was provoked by the release of a national budget with significant tax increases.

At the municipal Election held in March 2006, the PUP lost heavily winning only three of the available 67 seats. The UDP won the remaining 64 despite two other parties and four independent candidates having contested.

Shortly before the 2008 Election the Government announced that, in addition to the General Election ballot, Belizeans would be given the opportunity to vote in a referendum on whether the Senate should become an elected body. The introduction of the referendum was opposed by the UDP who were vocal in urging their supporters to ignore the referendum ballot entirely on polling day. The addition of the referendum also added a new dimension to previously well-established and understood voting procedures which many felt would be problematic. For example, the UDP, while having called for an elected Senate, felt that the proposal needed further discussion as to the form and content.

Chapter Three

ELECTORAL FRAMEWORK AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The Representation of the People Act and the Constitution regulate electoral procedures. In broad terms the Constitution prescribes for the Elections and Boundaries Commission whilst the appointment and functions of the Chief Elections Officer remain within the Representation of the People Act.

ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT BODIES

There are two Electoral Management Bodies (EMB) in Belize.

- The Elections and Boundaries Commission
- The Elections and Boundaries Department

THE ELECTIONS AND BOUNDARIES COMMISSION

At Belize's Independence in 1981, the functions and appointment of the Elections and Boundaries Commission were enshrined in the Belize Constitution under Section 88. This section was amended in 1988. At present, Section 88 (1) states that the Commission comprises one Chairman and four members.

Section 88 (2) states that the Governor-General appoints the Chairman and the four members with certain stipulations as follows:

- The Chair and two Members: "acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister given after consultation with the Leader of the Opposition"
- The other two Members: " acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister given with the concurrence of the Leader of the Opposition"

The five members of the Commission serve five year terms of office. National Assembly members and others who hold public office are barred from appointment to the Commission.

Functions

The functions of the Commission is reflected in Section 88 (13) and (14) and Section 90 of the Belize Constitution as follows:

Section 88

(13) "The Commission shall be responsible for the direction and supervision of the registration of voters and the conduct of elections, referenda and all matters connected therewith."

(14) In the exercise of its functions, the Commission shall not be subject to the direction or control of any other person or authority and shall, subject to the provisions of this Constitution, act in accordance with the Representation of the People Act or any other law, rule or regulation relating to elections."

Section 90

(1) "The Elections and Boundaries Commission shall, after considering the distribution of the population throughout Belize, make proposals from time to time for dividing Belize into electoral divisions."

(2) "The proposals of the Commission made pursuant to this section shall be laid before the National Assembly by the Chairman of the Commission."

THE ELECTIONS AND BOUNDARIES DEPARTMENT

The Elections and Boundaries Department was established in 1989. Subsequent to the constitutional amendments to Section 88 of the Constitution, amendments were made to the Administrative Provision of the Representation of The People Act (Statutory Instrument 26 of 1988). All staffing matters were then transferred from the Elections and Boundaries Commission to the Public Services Commission. An amendment to the Constitution by Act No. 2 of 2001, dated February 23, 2001, transferred jurisdiction over the Chief Elections Officer to the Public Services Commission.

The Department, headed by the Chief Elections Officer, is currently under the oversight of the Office for Good Governance which is in the Office of The Prime Minister. The Chief Elections Officer and staff are responsible for the day-to-day administration and all phases of the electoral process. The Chief Elections Officer is not a member of the Commission.

The Elections and Boundaries Department is national in scope with one Central Office, ten Branch Offices and three Sub-Offices. The Central Office, which is located in Belize City, serves as the administration center and storage for all records. Four Branch Offices are also located in Belize City. A Branch Office is located in each district town to serve the other Districts and in the Capital City of Belmopan. Three Sub-Offices are located in Independence Village, Stann Creek District, Benque Viejo del Carmen, Cayo District and San Pedro Ambergris Caye, Belize District. Each Branch Office is staffed with Registering and Assistant Registering Officers.

Functions

Under the Representation of The People Act, the areas of responsibility of the Department are Electoral Administration and the Adjustments of Electoral Records at Boundary Redistricting.

Electoral Administration includes:

- Organizing and directing the registration of voters
- Compiling electoral registers
- Updating and maintaining electoral records
- Organizing the conduct of elections
- Transfer of Electors

The Independence of an Election Management Body

This complex structure of having two bodies, one of which reports directly into the Prime Minister's office seriously compromises the perception of independence for any election management body. The team observed that whilst there was confidence in the Elections and Boundaries Department in relation to the huge logistical exercise of an election there was some suspicion over the oversight role of the Office of Good Governance.

The present situation is that the Director of the Office of Good Governance is the former Chief Elections Officer and, since the current Acting Chief Elections Officer has only been in the position since October 2007, the Director was playing a hands-on role coordinating and advising on Elections. As the Director of the Office of Good Governance reports directly to the Prime Minister, this unofficial "advisory" role to the Elections and Boundaries Department was met with much dissatisfaction by the opposition parties and some members of civil society. Indeed, the team observed that during our meeting with the Chief Elections Officer and other senior members of her team, the Director of the Office of Good Governance was not only present but actively chaired the meeting.

THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The Team observed that the main civil society group that was active, visible and vocal during the Election was the Association of Concerned Belizeans (ACB). They mounted a very strong campaign for a fair and transparent election. *Inter alia*, they raised an

objection to the use of cellular phones with cameras because it had been feared that cellular phones would be used to photograph persons who may at the same time be in the process of voting. It was also believed that a cellular phone taken into the booth may be used to photograph ballots cast, for the end purpose of collecting a bribe. Government supporters referred to them as the '*Association Concerned for Barrow*' (The Leader of the Opposition). However, their views appeared to be influential to the extent that during a phone-in TV programme on the morning after the election, many people phoned to thank them.

There were no civil society groups acting as local domestic election observers or involved in voter education activities and the training of women candidates.

Many of the civil society groups in Belize focus on environmental issues. There are relatively few civil society groups within the field of good governance. These include but were not limited to:

The Society for the Promotion of Education and Research (SPEAR) – were involved in researching and producing opinion polls. One poll published a week before the Election showed the PUP party behind the UDP party. The PUP quickly commissioned their own poll which produced the opposite result.

Women's Issues Network – WIN-Belize: (*established in 1993 and officially registered in 1998*) a network of service organisations which co-ordinates, facilitates and advocates for policies, mechanisms and services aimed at promoting the empowerment of women in Belize. Their main concern during the Election was that none of the parties had consulted with the Network when formulating their policies that impacted on women. In addition, WIN-Belize informed the team that although women were very much involved in campaigning for the parties they did not find the political environment appropriate for running as a candidate.

In spite of the existence of such a group, Belizean politics does not seem to have a mechanism for encouraging women to participate actively as candidates. The participation of Belizean women in politics in terms of campaigning and acting as scrutineers for their parties was extremely high. Women in Belize have also been appointed to high offices such as Foreign Minister, Permanent Secretaries, Chief Education Officers and during the Election the Team noted that women dominated among polling officials at all levels and in the senior positions within the Elections and Boundaries Department. However, apart from the PUP which fielded two female candidates, three other women were candidates, one each by two of the smaller parties and one independent.

If more women are to participate as candidates there will have to be a concerted effort to encourage them, otherwise the number of women in Parliament will remain low or non-existent, as is the case in the incoming parliament. It need hardly be stated that there is the need for gender balance in representational politics lest important women's issues be overlooked.

VOTER EDUCATION

In 2003, The Elections and Boundaries Commission published *A Voter Education Framework*. This was not updated for the 2008 Election, which included voting for a referendum on an elected senate.

Voter education was provided through the Elections and Boundaries Department, political parties, TV, radio and newspapers. While Belizeans seem well versed in the procedures for voting, the addition of a second ballot for the referendum was potentially confusing.

Insufficient voter information on the referendum ballot was noticed on Election Day as some voters mistakenly placed their ballot papers in the wrong ballot box.

Chapter Four

THE CAMPAIGN

The Media

We had the opportunity to observe the final stages of the campaign and, in our view, it was robust. Clearly freedom of expression is alive in this Belizean democracy as the parties fearlessly put forward their campaign platforms.

The media were accommodating as we heard no complaint that respective messages could not be communicated, though the smaller parties said that lack of funding forced them to get their messages out through phoning in to call-in radio programmes and talk shows rather than purchasing airtime.

Belize has no daily newspaper so there is heavy reliance on radio and TV as the fora for political advertising, debate, news and current affairs. Both major parties had their own radio stations as did one of the third parties.

In addition to clearly identified 'party' newspapers, there are two weekly newspapers in Belize and they were described to us as generally independent but with the perception of each having its own political leaning to one or other of the two major political parties. However, it was not suggested that either major political party was unable to transmit its message to the electorate, but rather that the bias manifested itself through the expression of opinions, of which there were a plethora.

The Issues

The UDP was unapologetic in including in their issues those of corruption, land distribution, cronyism and the general need for change. Every message in the media and several speeches at the campaign rallies focused upon those issues and gave specifics concerning the charges of rampant cronyism and corruption and identified the areas and persons involved in the alleged tainted land deals.

The PUP on the other hand sought to blunt the power of their opponents' message and concentrated on their performance as government and their vision for the future.

Other issues and allegations which arose during the campaign included accusations of hurried large-scale granting of citizenship to Guatemalans; the granting of loans and land titles in return for loyalty to the PUP at the polls; the registration of voters in districts in which they did not reside; and the outright buying of votes with payment to be made upon proof of how people cast their ballots.

This last was exacerbated by a heated debate over the possible use of cell phone cameras in polling booths to record how a vote was cast. The Election and Boundaries Commission, we were told, had agreed unanimously to ban cell phones in polling stations in order to allay these fears but a disagreement then ensued between Commissioners and parties as to the administrative and/or legislative requirements to implement such a ban. Uncertainty on whether the ban would or would not be imposed continued until the day before elections when the Prime Minister signed a statutory instrument allowing cell phones into polling stations but barring the taking of photos with them.

The Atmosphere

While the messages were tough and often vituperative, the campaign and election as a whole were conducted with surprising good humour. Catchy campaign songs for and against both major parties and even individual candidates dominated the airwaves. While supporters of all parties were passionate, vocal and adorned in their party colours and slogans, there were few incidents of violence though there were some unconfirmed allegations of intimidation.

Chapter Five

THE POLL, COUNT AND RESULTS PROCESS

THE POLL, COUNT AND RESULTS PROCESS

The team observed voting in 136 polling stations across all 31 constituencies. We were able to observe voting in a cross section of urban, rural and remote, large and small polling stations. In general terms, voting proceeded in an orderly fashion with voters often waiting patiently for their turn to vote and election officers competently performing their duties.

Location, Layout and Facilities of Polling Stations

For the most part, polling stations were located in schools, community centres or other public buildings. It appears that the Elections and Boundaries Department attempted to assign between 400-600 voters to each polling station. Unfortunately, in rural areas this meant that many voters had to travel long distances to reach their polling stations. To mitigate some of this problem, political parties provided transportation for their supporters with the result that independent voters were at a disadvantage.

A number of the rooms in which polling stations were set up were very small, which made it difficult to ensure the secrecy of the vote. However, from our observations we were able to conclude that at most locations the election officials configured their polling stations in such a way as to ensure that the voters were able to mark their ballots with privacy.

Although the facilities available to the election officials are basic in terms of tables and chairs, they were able to utilise that which was available to perform their duties without hindrances.

People were not permitted to congregate within 100 yards of a polling station. A line was marked on the ground to designate the 100 yard boundary.

Opening of the Poll

The law governing election stipulates that the hours of voting are from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Polling officials – one Presiding Officer and two Poll Clerks – are required to be at the polling station at 6:00 a.m. to post up the required election signs and notices and to ensure the polling station is set up for voting.

At 6:45 a.m. the Presiding Officer shows the empty ballot box to the attending candidate agents and any other authorised witnesses. The ballot box is then locked and ready to receive ballots.

The polling stations which the Team observed opened on time and in accordance with the prescribed procedure.

Voting Procedure

When voting commenced, each voter was required to show identification. The majority of voters presented their Voter Identification Card. The first Polling Clerk would look for the voter's name in the voters list, announcing aloud the name (and in some cases the registration number and date of birth) for the benefit of the scrutineers. If the name was found a line was ruled through the name and the voter proceeded over to the Presiding Officer to obtain a ballot. If the voter's name was not found in the voters list, the second Polling Clerk would look for the voter's original voter registration card in the Record Card Binder. Upon finding the registration card the voter proceeded to the Presiding Officer.

However, if a registration card was not found, the person was not allowed to vote. On some occasions the Team observed that voters who had not found their names on either the register or binder were referred to the Elections and Boundaries Department and polling officials made every effort to assist in finding the names. The incidence of voters' names being absent from the register was minimal and the parties' representatives expressed general satisfaction with the accuracy of the voters list.

The Presiding Officer would initial the back of the ballot paper, and having instructed the voter on the voting process, would have the voter dip the right forefinger into indelible ink, hand the candidate ballot to the voter, and then the voter would proceed to the voting booth to mark the ballot with a specially provided pencil. Having marked and folded the ballot with the Presiding Officer's initials showing, the voter would drop the ballot into the ballot box.

With the senatorial referendum being held simultaneously, if the voter wished to vote on the issue of an elected Senate, after dropping the candidate ballot into the ballot box, the voter would return to the Presiding Officer to obtain a referendum ballot. The voter would dip the middle finger of the right hand into the indelible ink and then proceed to mark this ballot and then drop it into a separately marked referendum ballot box. The voter would then leave the polling station through a designated exit.

The methodology employed by Presiding Officers in relation to the referendum ballot varied from station to station. In one instance party officials complained that the Presiding Officer refused to draw voters' attention to the referendum ballot (the Presiding Officer in question confirmed that this was correct). In another, party officials complained that in drawing the ballot to the attention of voters the Presiding Officers were in effect actively encouraging a 'yes' vote. One Presiding Officer insisted that all voters take both ballot papers, while others merely asked the voter if he/she wished to receive the referendum ballot paper. All this even though there was a clear guide to election officials. In a number of instances we observed voters placing their general election ballot into the referendum ballot box and vice versa. This was likely due to inadvertence.

Selection and Efficiency of Election Officers

All Election Officers are national public service employees. The Elections and Boundaries Department requests names of potential officers from Belize government ministries. The selected names are placed before the Elections and Boundaries Commission for approval. It is clear that this is merely a rubber stamping exercise for it is not possible for the Commission members to know each of the hundreds of employees from all areas of the country. The Elections and Boundaries Department then assigns these employees to their positions and localities, localities which may be in a different area of the country from where they work and/or reside.

From our observation it was evident that, although the basic election laws and guidelines were adhered to, some polling officials had their own interpretation as to how the voting procedures were to be implemented. In many locations these varying applications of procedures led to significant backlogs and unnecessarily long waiting times for voters. However, it must also be noted that the introduction of the referendum ballot did in and of itself add considerably to the slowness of the voting process.

Assisted Voters

It was noted that where elderly or disabled voters came to vote they were treated with care and dignity. These voters were, for the most part, assisted in voting by the person in whose care they were, with Presiding Officers vigilant as to the process.

Role of Candidate Agents

Candidates are permitted to appoint two agents to be present at each polling station to scrutinize the voting proceedings on their behalf. However, in at least one polling station

in Cayo the Team observed that, due to the cramped facilities, only one agent per candidate had been allowed.

The two parties which put up candidates in all 31 constituencies had at least one agent in every polling station. The other political parties fielded agents in many polling stations in the constituencies where they had nominated candidates. In the Toledo East constituency the Independent candidate had agents at a number of polling stations. We observed that the agents were knowledgeable about their roles, were vigilant in their tasks, and were not obstructive to the process.

Closing of the Polling Station

Belize employs the central counting centre process to count ballots. Therefore no ballots are counted at polling stations. Polling stations are required to close at 6:00 p.m. if there are no voters waiting to vote. If there is a queue of voters, at 6:00 p.m. a police officer marks the end of the queue and no more voters are permitted to join the line. All voters in the queue are permitted to vote before the poll is closed. In all Districts, Team members observed polling stations closing after 6.00 p.m. and, in Stann Creek, one polling station did not close until 8:30 p.m.

When the last voter had voted, the Presiding Officer would lock the ballot boxes and place a waxed seal over the ballot slot. The Presiding Officer then reconciled the number of voters who voted to the used and unused ballot papers and have the candidates' agents sign off on the reconciliation. The ballot boxes would then be transported to the counting centre. The Presiding Officer would be accompanied by the Poll Clerks, a police officer and one agent for each of the candidates, if present.

The Count

There was one central counting centre established for each constituency. When each Presiding Officer arrived at the counting centre, the reconciliation documents completed at the polling station were reviewed by the Returning Officer or Election Clerk. If the documentation was in order, the polling officials were released and the documentation and ballot boxes were set aside until the count started. If the documentation was not in order, the polling officials had to review their material and make the necessary corrections. The counting did not commence until all of the ballot boxes had been received from all of the polling stations.

Once the count commenced, two ballot boxes were counted simultaneously. Each counting team consisted of four counting officers: one to unfold and call out the vote on the ballot, one to stack the ballots according to the vote and bundle in units of 25, and two counting officers to record the votes on tally sheets. Each candidate was permitted to appoint two agents for each ballot box. All candidate ballot boxes were counted before the referendum ballot boxes were counted.

As noted earlier, some voters did place their ballots into the wrong ballot box. During the count of candidate ballots, where referendum ballots were discovered the respective polling station was noted and the ballots were set aside to be added to the referendum count. However, in Cayo Central Bay this varied. We actually saw a ballot opened and the ballot papers counted to retrieve one misplaced referendum ballot before the official counting of the votes began. This meant that the length of time for counting was doubled because the ballot papers were counted twice.

During the count of referendum ballots, where candidate ballots were discovered, the candidate tally sheets and Statements of Poll for the respective polling stations were amended accordingly with agents signing off on the amendments.

At the conclusion of the count of all candidate ballot boxes, and then the referendum ballot boxes, the Returning Officer completed a Statement of Poll for the constituency.

Security at the Polling Stations

The National Police Force was responsible for providing security at all polling stations. Based on an analysis of the number of voters assigned to a polling station, whether there was more than one polling station at the location, previous electoral experiences and the atmosphere of the campaign, local police commanders assigned an appropriate number of police officers to each polling station.

While there was a visible police presence at the polling station, this was not seen as an intimidating presence. For the most part the police assisted in maintaining peace and order in and around the polling stations.

Chapter Six

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Having observed the 2008 General Election, the Team has observed that Belize enjoys a mature democracy and a well-functioning electoral process. While the inclusion of a ballot for the referendum at short notice caused some confusion and added to the length of the process, the voting and counting were carried out efficiently and the Team is of the view that the 2008 General Election were credible. We are aware that up to the time of writing this report we have heard no complaint that the conduct of the election affected the results.

The following recommendations seek to identify areas and make suggestions on improvements which can be made to the electoral structure, process and environment in Belize.

- To work towards a single independent election management body which reports directly to Parliament and is autonomous from any government department.
- Thought should be given to expanding the Election and Boundaries Commission to include independent members with the Chairman appointed from this group.
- The Chief Elections Officer should report directly to the Commission and be responsible to them for the day to day conduct of elections. A reconstituted Elections and Boundaries Commission should continue to have the authority to request names of Public Service employees from Government Ministries to act as election officers.
- It is recommended that enabling mechanisms should be used to overcome the barriers to women's participation, change perceptions and increase women's participation as candidates. A number of models to achieve this can be found in Commonwealth countries.
- It is recommended that for transparency of the electoral process, disclosure of funding and expenditure on campaigns should be filed with the relevant Election Management Body and made publicly available.
- It would be useful for the Presiding Officer to be provided with a master voters list for each division. This would speed up any queries that may occur in relation to where a voter should cast his vote.
- We would encourage the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth to respond positively to any relevant requests for technical assistance in relation to these recommendations.

List of Meetings Held

Elections and Boundaries Commission

Elections and Boundaries Department

Peoples United Party (PUP)

United Democratic Party (UDP)

VIP

National Belize Alliance (NBA)

British High Commission

Embassy of United States of America

Organisation of American States (OAS)

Association of Concerned Belizians

WinBelize

Public Services Union

Human Rights Commission

Composition of the Commonwealth Expert Team

Senator K D Knight QC (Jamaica – Chairperson)

Mr K D Knight was a member of Jamaica's House of Representatives and was Minister of Foreign Affairs from November 2001 until March 2006. He was previously Minister of National Security and Justice from 1989 to 2001. Mr Knight was elected to Parliament in 1989. He now sits in the Senate.

Senator Knight was admitted to the Inner Bar as the Queen's Counsel in 1995. He was member of the Commonwealth Observer Group which was present for the elections in 1980 which led to Zimbabwe's independence.

He chaired the Commonwealth Observer Group for the Fiji General Elections in May 2006. Senator Knight served as President of the U.N. Security Council in 2001 when Jamaica was elected as a non permanent member.

Dr Mrs Nemata Eshun-Baiden (Sierra Leone)

Dr. Mrs. Nemata Eshun-Baiden, who started her career as an Educator, has worked in gender, leadership, advocacy and politics since 1999. She has worked in Sierra Leone, Somalia, the UK, the USA, Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, the Gambia and Liberia to empower women through structured training to participate in politics. She also works with civil society activists, youths and members of the media. She is an experienced trainer of Women in Politics, campaigner, advocate and lobbyist on women's equal representation and the 30% quota.

She founded the 50/50Group of Sierra Leone (*first African group to win the Madeleine Albright Award*) in November 2000 to campaign for equal representation for women in politics and public life through training and advocacy.

Dr. Mrs. Nemata Eshun-Baiden was given a consultancy by the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) to help develop the Liberian Women's Manifesto and train their candidates. She was a Commonwealth Observer in the 2002 Pakistan elections.

Mr Robert Patterson (Canada)

Robert Patterson is a former Chief Electoral Officer (1990-2002) of British Columbia, Canada. For over twenty years, he was personally involved with administering the democratic process in British Columbia, having held senior management positions since 1978. He was also responsible for administering election finance and recall and public initiative legislation and served as a member of the Province's Electoral Boundaries Commission.

Mr. Patterson has served as a member of several international electoral assessment and observation missions which have taken him to such diverse countries such as Malawi, Ethiopia, Yemen, The Gambia, South Africa, Nigeria, Jamaica, Guyana, Papua New Guinea, Ukraine and the Republic of Georgia. He has also been an advisor to electoral commissions in Papua New Guinea, Liberia, Zambia and the Palestinian Territory. In Canada, he was a member of a national committee to develop strategies for educating students and other first-time voters on the electoral process. He was on the Steering Committee of the International Council on Governmental Ethics Laws and co-chair, with the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, of the Advisory Committee on the National Register of Electors.