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December 21st 2012 - Somaliland local elections: International Election Observers applaud commitment to democracy, but say action is required to ensure future election integrity.

With results finally confirmed in Somaliland's local elections, held on November 28th 2012, the international election observation mission assembled by Progressio, DPU and Somaliland Focus (UK) congratulates the people of Somaliland and the National Electoral Commission (NEC) on a lively and enthusiastic election campaign and voting process.

However, in advance of writing our final report, to be released in mid-2013, we must also report a number of substantial concerns.

The election's aftermath has been marked by a build-up of tension over the course of a slow counting process. Once results began to be released, the NEC came under extreme pressure over disputes to results from several sides, and was subjected to a shooting attack on its headquarters in the town of Erigavo. Regrettably, post-election protests saw a number of deaths in protests in Hargeisa, Somaliland's capital.

Although the NEC has now moved to confirm results, and we have been heartened by various political leaders urging their supporters to maintain peace and security when protesting, we recognise that the post-election climate remains tense.

Our post-poll concerns follow those we expressed immediately following polling day, when we noted that observers reported attempts at multiple and underage voting and what appeared to be attempts to mobilise voters to engage in these attempts. While observers also noted polling station staff attempting to prevent such activity, such reports pose concerns for the integrity of Somaliland's electoral process.

Now, a month on from voting, it is important that disputes around the election outcome are peacefully settled. Without peaceful settlement of disputes, Somaliland's admirable democratic tradition may be damaged. We urge all Somalilanders to respect the electoral laws and procedures, so that future elections can be approached effectively and with confidence.

Specifically, we repeat the recommendation we made immediately following polling day: in advance of the next elections, we call for Somaliland to adopt a robust system for voter/citizen registration, in order to improve confidence in the electoral process.

In closing, we would like to highlight the many positives around this election: once again, Somalilanders showed how dedicated they are to the unique democratic spirit they have crafted from their challenging history. In particular, we are delighted to note real progress in inclusion of youth and women in the process: the apparent election of ten female candidates represents a huge step forward, and we look forward to further progress on this front.

Dr Michael Walls, the mission's joint co-ordinator, said "Somaliland has made enormous progress in achieving a difficult transition to a form of representative democracy. We have long been impressed with that process, and call on all Somalilanders to maintain their commitment to a peaceful form of democratic and participatory decision-making."

Notes to Editors

1. For further information or to arrange an interview with a member of the coordination team, please contact Conrad Heine on +44 7870 642 852 / media@somalilandfocus.org.uk, or Lucy Jenkinson on 020 7326 2011 / lucyj@progressio.org.uk, or Tim Aldred on 020 7326 2003 / +44 7740 543 047 / tim@progressio.org.uk.
2. Somaliland declared unilateral independence from Somalia in 1991 following the collapse of Somalia's government. It remains internationally unrecognised.
3. A team of 50 observers from 17 countries was assembled by Progressio, DPU and Somaliland Focus (UK) to observe Somaliland's local elections on November 28th 2012. The mission follows on from observations of Somaliland's inaugural local elections in 2002, followed by the parliamentary elections in 2005, judged by observers as "basically free and fair", and the presidential election in 2010 <http://www.progressio.org.uk/sites/default/files/Somaliland-elections-2010-report.pdf>, which saw an orderly transfer of power and was judged "a peaceful expression of popular will".
4. The 2012 mission covered almost 20% of more than 1,700 polling stations in 15 of the 21 districts across Somaliland in which voting took place.
5. The mission was invited by Somaliland's National Electoral Commission (NEC), and funded by Britain's Department for International Development (DFID). We presented a post-poll interim report to the NEC and donors, and a final report will follow in 2013.
6. A pre-election assessment of the conditions for the local elections took place in 2012 and can be viewed here:
<http://www.progressio.org.uk/sites/progressio.org.uk/files/Preparing-for-local-elections-Sld-2012.pdf>
7. For more information about Progressio, please see www.progressio.org.uk and about Somaliland Focus, see www.somalilandfocus.org.uk.