

**REPORT ON THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN TIMOR-LESTE
30 JUNE 2007**

BY

THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY INTERNATIONAL OBSERVER TEAM¹

Summary

The first democratic elections in Timor-Leste to be conducted by the Timorese authorities themselves (with advice and assistance from the United Nations Mission in Timor-Leste - UNMIT) were an outstanding success.

Polling day proceeded smoothly with no major incident being observed by the ALP team nor brought to the team's attention at the nine polling centres observed – in the capital Dili, the mountainous sub-district of Bazartete and the western district of Liquica. Electoral staff were well trained and efficient in their conduct of proceedings, voters were confident, keen and orderly (having had the benefit of two recent practice runs with the two rounds of the Presidential elections on 9 April and 9 May) and the security forces visible but discreet. Turn out was quite heavy at the opening of the polls and steady thereafter, with some observers noting numbers were a little down on the Presidential elections.

The anticipated problems surrounding the transfer of the sealed ballot boxes from the polling centres to the 13 District Counting Centres did not eventuate, although the complicated logistics caused delays - in the case of Baucau a lengthy delay with reception of the ballot boxes not being completed until 5.30am on the Sunday.

Security was provided at all polling centres by UNPOL and the Timorese Police Force (PNTL). Their presence was low-key and they kept outside the 25 metre exclusion zone around polling centres. UNPOL also provided the security for the convoys which collected the ballots and took them to the district counting centres. The Australia / New Zealand International Stabilisation Force (ISF) provided the helicopters for transporting ballot boxes from remote and inaccessible polling centres.

At two of the three district centres where counting was observed by the team (Manatuto and Baucau) counting proceeded efficiently and transparently. Party scrutineers were present in force and appeared satisfied with the process. National and international observers were also well in evidence. At the third centre (Dili), counting did not begin until 11am Monday, 2 July. It was reported to the team that party representatives had caused problems at the reception of the ballot boxes, which caused the election authorities to suspend the process for a

¹ This report is based on observations made and reports to hand for the period 27 June to 4pm 4 July.

lengthy period. Counting had been concluded in 12 of the 13 districts, with Dili having completed 72 per cent.

The ALP observer team is satisfied on the basis of its observations and the reports that it has received that the Parliamentary Elections in Timor-Leste have been conducted in a free, fair and transparent manner and takes this opportunity to congratulate the Timorese election authorities, UNMIT, the political parties of Timor-Leste, the security forces and the Timorese people on this very substantial achievement.

The Campaign

The observer team arrived in Dili in time to observe part of the final day of the election campaign (27 June). The campaign was very much in evidence in the streets of Dili, with campaign posters scattered around the city, party rallies being conducted at various locations and truck loads of rowdy Fretilin supporters moving through the streets. CNRT were the clear winners of the election poster campaign, with Fretilin a distant second. The team attended the Fretilin rally, which was attended by several thousand excited, but on the whole well-behaved supporters, most of whom were trucked in from the eastern districts of Baucau, Viqueque and Lautem, and the very much smaller (200-300) rally of the Republican Party.

The electoral law wisely provides for a two-day cooling-off period prior to polling day, observance of which is encouraged by the penalties for breaches of 6 months to one year detention or a fine of \$250 – \$500 US.

The team was unable to comment on the media coverage of the campaign other than to note that all parties featured in the daily papers during the team's stay and party leaders were given 15 minutes each to address the nation on the state-owned TV-RTTL.

Polling Day

The parliamentary elections were the first to be conducted by the Timorese authorities themselves – the National Election Commission (CNE) and the Technical Secretariat for Election Administration (STAE) – with the advice and assistance of UNMIT. Previous elections have been conducted by the UN on behalf of the Timorese authorities.

Perhaps the highest compliment the team can pay the election organisers is to note that observing the elections quickly became tedious. All electoral staff were correctly uniformed, appropriately trained and remarkably confident and competent in their supervision of proceedings; all polling centers were alike (mainly schools); booths were set up identically; procedures were the same; and voters were uniformly orderly, composed and clearly enthusiastic about exercising their vote.

The team saw no evidence of any intimidation of voters. Security was assured at the polling centres and no campaigning of any sort – campaign material, identification of party members or supporters – was permitted in or near the centres. At one polling centre the team observed one young voter being ejected from the queue for wearing a CNRT T-shirt.

Voters were clearly identified by showing their voter registration card and having it perforated, they cast their vote in the privacy of booths and were required to dip their finger in indelible ink as further evidence of their having voted. Ballot boxes were sealed by electoral staff, with the seal numbers being announced and recorded. All of this took place under the watchful eyes of party agents, national and international observers and the numerous interested onlookers who peered in the windows at every centre.

The transparency of the polling process was, in the view of the team, beyond dispute.

Transport of the Ballot Boxes

The removal of the ballot boxes from the polling centres to the 13 district centres for counting was a contentious issue. Previously the votes had been counted at the polling centres. The change had been made by the Government on the eve of the campaign on the grounds that centralised counting would prevent identification of voting patterns at the polling centres and thus limit the possibility of intimidation or recrimination. Critics of the change were concerned about the security of the ballot boxes, the reaction of the voters on seeing their votes being taken away, the diminution in the transparency of the process and the unnecessary confusion created by the change. These concerns, while justified, were only partly vindicated.

Security during the collection process was effectively provided by UNPOL and, in the remoter areas, by the ISF. The process adopted was for a motor convoy to collect ballot boxes from a number of different polling centres. The boxes were placed in the back of open trucks and accompanied by electoral staff and party agents. The convoy system created delays in the collection and processing of the ballots as centres later in the itinerary waited for the convoy to arrive. At centre 339 in Maubara the team waited from closing of the centre at 3:45pm until 6pm for the convoy to arrive. Most party agents and observers had drifted off well before its arrival.

When convoys arrived at the district counting centres there were again lengthy delays in unloading, receiving and recording the ballot boxes. In Baucau that process was not completed until 5:30am the next morning. Fears of a hostile reaction by locals to the removal of the ballots in the event proved unfounded. As the chief of the municipality of Bazartete told the team, the people had sufficient confidence in the system to accept it.

The Counting Process

The team attended three of the 13 district counting centres (Manatuto, Baucau and Dili) and observed the delivery of the ballot boxes to the District Counting Centre at Liquica, having accompanied the convoy there from Polling Centre 339 at Maubara.

The ballot boxes were opened by STAE officials, with the seals being read out and verified by those party agents and observers who chose to do so. Counting of ballots was carried out by small teams on large tables (two at Manatuto, seven at Baucau and six at Dili). The team leader at each table displayed each ballot to those observing and called out the result, which could be seen by an X or a perforation in the appropriate box). The ballot was then placed in the relevant party pile.

Party agents / scrutineers were able to challenge the team leader's call of the result of the ballot and the team observed a couple of such challenges. The team notes that it was difficult for parties to scrutineer effectively at counting centres with large numbers of counting teams. The team also noted a relatively large number of ballots were declared null where the intention of the voter was obvious but the box had been marked with a sign other than an X or a perforation. These ballots are to be forwarded to the CNE in Dili for review and a decision on their admissibility. It will be important that the procedures adopted for this review are no less transparent than for the rest of the counting process given the relatively large number of ballots involved.

At the time of the team's departure in the afternoon of 4 July, counting had been completed at 12 of the 13 District Counting Centres. At the Dili Counting Centre 72 per cent of the vote had been counted. Overall, 95 per cent of the vote had been counted and turnout was estimated to have been 81 per cent.

The results, for the parties polling over the three per cent threshold – as issued by the National Electoral Commission (CNE) – were as follows:

UNDERTIM (12,696) 3.2%
CNRT (89,899) 23.0%
PD (45,232) 11.6%
ASDT-PSD (61,490) 15.7%
AD KOTA-PPT (12,762) 3.3%
FRETILIN (114,725) 29.4%
PUN (18,309) 4.7%

Total votes null and void (12, 637) 3.1%

Security

Security for the election was provided by UNPOL and the Timorese Police Force (PNTL), who guarded polling centres and District Counting Centres, patrolled all areas of the country and provided security for the convoys transporting the ballot boxes. The security presence at individual locations was quite small (2 – 6 per location, other than in Dili where the security presence was much greater) and they kept outside the prescribed 25 metre exclusion zone.

The ISF transported the ballot boxes from the remoter areas by helicopter and were on alert to provide assistance to the other security forces if required. The team has not observed, and is not aware of, any serious incidents which have taken place since the team's arrival on 27 June.

Conclusion

The ALP observer team is satisfied on the basis of its observations and the reports that it has received that the Parliamentary Elections in Timor-Leste have been conducted in a free, fair and transparent manner and takes this opportunity to congratulate the Timorese elections authorities, UNMIT, the political parties of Timor-Leste, the security forces and the Timorese people on this very substantial achievement.

George Thompson and Neville Conway
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4 July 2007

Annex A – Polling Centres Visited on Election Day

District	Sub-district	Name	Number
Dili	Vera Cruz	Farol Primary School	216
Dili	Nain Feto	Duque de Caixas Primary School	221
Dili	Nain Feto	Katolica Balide Primary School	218
Dili	Vera Cruz	Vila Verde Municipal HQ	212
Dili	Dom Aleixo	No 2 Comoro Pre-secondary School	234
Dili	Dom Aleixo	30 August Pre-secondary School	238
Liquica	Bazartete	Ulmera Primary School	323
Liquica	Bazartete	Fatumasi Primary School	314
Liquica	Maubara	Vaviquina Primary School	339

Annex B – Counting Centres Visited

Manatuto
Baucau
Dili