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SOME HINTS ON COMBATTING ELECTION FRAUD IN CAMEROON AFTER THE MEETING HELD IN BAMEDA FROM MARCH 2 – 12, 2007

Introduction

National elections have often been characterised by desperate irregularities through all the stages of the electoral process with the express intension of giving victory to the CPDM party at the expense of other parties and also to give a façade of multiparty democracy in our country. We can not easily forget that in the 1992 presidential election, victory was allocated by the Supreme Court to Mr. Paul Biya and in 1997; parliamentary seats were announced by Kontchou before the elections. This means that in addition to the normal rigging, there is also broad daylight rubbery in elections in this country.

Therefore, if the opposition parties, especially SDF the credible opposition party has to remain in politics, the militants have a secrete duty to fight and eliminate all electoral frauds in Cameroon. The first and most important thing to do is for the party militants at all stages to be conversant with the basic requirements of transparent, free and fair elections as provided by the texts in force. It is easy to cheat a person if he does not know what he deserves.

The purpose of this resolution is therefore to bring out some of the mechanisms of fraud that are usually put in place before, during and after the election process so as to manipulate the results of the voting process.

The role of election monitors as independent observers and our role as a political party:

The role of the election observers is simply to document the quantitative and qualitative action taking place before, during and after elections, noting whether such actions are in accordance with national and international laws and practices. These observers, in Cameroon are made up of the Christian Electoral Observers, International Observers, Non-governmental Organisations, and Syndicates or trade unions. The objective of these observers is to follow up the electoral process and eventually publish their findings as non partisan bodies. They have no ambitions to directly influence the process in favour of any candidate or party, but simply to note whether the process is carried out according to the law or not.

The role of the SDF is different. It is to ensure that the process is carried out in conformity with the law, making sure that no individual candidate or group of candidates or a given political party is unduly singled out for political favours in the electoral process. This is the major task that we have in any upcoming elections

How do we accomplish this task?

We have pointed out earlier that the electoral process consists in what happens before, during and after the elections. This means that all these three stages are susceptible to electoral fraud and if any of them is ignored in the process, this can be an easy source of manipulating the final outcome of the polls.

What steps can we take to combat fraud before the polls?

a) *Voter Registration*: In this country voters registration is carried out by administrative officers who are overtly CPDM militants. In Public they pretend to be non partisan in carrying out and updating the electoral registers but in practice they favour the registration of CPDM militants. They equally carry out this exercise enthusiastically in CPDM strongholds and relax their efforts when it comes to opposition areas. (See the joint communique issued by the SDF Provincial Chairman Centre Province, the Secretary General of the Centre Province representing the Governor and the Vice President of Neo on the 14th of March 2002, concerning irregularities noticed during voter registration in the Centre province).

In some cases, CPDM militants have been known to propagate information to the effect that whatever happens they will still rig and win the elections. This provocation has the effect of discouraging voters from registering and voting because they say “what does it change whether you vote or you don’t vote”. The main task of the SDF in this respect is to encourage voters and even help them to register and vote because if you don’t vote, you will never be able to accuse anybody of stealing or rigging. Also, the party and other people of goodwill nationally and internationally are progressively working hard to see to it that elections in Cameroon are free, fair and transparent as a means of avoiding civil strife as has occurred in other countries because of elections.

Militants of the SDF at all levels should be able to give information to others about the requirements for the registration of candidates age (20 years), current ID Cards (computerized, non-computerized or receipt of computerized ID Card) some voters complain of long distances to registration centres. In some cases, Mayors and Parliamentarians have

initiated the displacement of registration officers to rural centres to facilitate registration. Recently, the CPDM sent out a servant to go out nationwide, door to door especially in rural areas of opposition strongholds to doll out money to poor villagers and convince them to register in exercise books as CPDM militants. These names are supposed to be transcribed into the electoral register as militants of the CPDM and eventually used as a basis for fraud although one never knows where even the CPDM representative at the polls will vote! It should be noted that section 61 of Cameroon Electoral Code states among other things that “On the 30th day of April of each year, the Sub divisional Officer shall after making all such amendments as are lawfully ordered, forward to the Senior Divisional Officer a list of the amendments and close the register(s) of electors for his administrative unit. “(Ref Edition Consaf at 2002 of Conscience Africane).

b) The campaign

The responsibility of the party in each area should:

- i) Ensure that sufficient information be provided to voters about where and how they will vote.
- ii) Try to attend all party meetings and rallies in their area.
- iii) Inform militants about possibilities of intimidation and false promises.
- iv) Make sure that meetings and rallies are held under required conditions.
- v) Make sure that party posters are not defaced or removed.
- vi) Ensure that party information sent to the media (official and non-official) is broadcast or published.
- vii) Ensure that information about the party, about voting requirements and about the need to vote reaches every nook and cranny of your area.
- viii) When possible facilitates, the movement of voters to voting stations.

c) Pre-polling arrangements:

You should:

- i) Tell the voters two days to voting day whether the registration lists are reliable and when they should vote.
- ii) Make sure you have a reliable SDF representative from the polling station commission through to the Divisional Supervisory Commission. One important thing to emphasis here is that the party representative should be warned not to accept offers of drinks or food or any such enticements during working hours.
- iii) Ensure that there are no polling stations in private residences as have often been observed in the past.

- iv) Ensure that voters have their registration cards and that information on it is correct.

d) During Polling

Be sure that:

- i) All your representatives at the polling station arrive at least thirty minutes before voting starts.
- ii) That the station has all the relevant party material for your party, the SDF.
- iii) Ballot papers, ballot boxes and seals are intact on their arrival at the polling station otherwise some rigger could extract ballot papers and pocket them for use in the booth.
- iv) Ballot boxes are shown to members of the commission to be empty before being sealed in the full view of party representatives and observers.

Note: sometimes riggers tape envelope to the lid of the ballot boxes and display the seemingly empty box to the viewers and later release the envelopes containing ballot papers into the box! Beware: examine all the four sides of the ballot box before it is sealed and placed in the booth.

- v) Voter who are still waiting to vote when the closing time reaches are allowed to vote.
- vi) Avoid any distraction which can take away your representative's attention from his duties.
- vii) In rural areas your representative could be subjected to intimidation or coercion. Guard against this.
- viii) That each voter is issued a correct number of ballot papers to vote correctly.
- ix) That no incidence is provoked to disrupt the polling process. This can be intentional to seize the opportunity to stuff the ballot boxes.
- x) All the necessary provisions concerning ballot papers, stubs ballot boxes, seals etc. are respected.
- xi) That you are satisfied with the action of polling at the close of the polls.

e) Counting of the Votes

- i) Counting should take place in the polling station immediately after the polls.
- ii) Officials and voters are permitted to be present for counting.
- iii) See attached sheets for counting procedure.

- v) Above all do not separate yourself from the ballot box even if for certain reasons (like light failure which can sometimes be provoked) the votes are to be counted at the sub divisional office. Always have your two eyes on the ballot box at the close of the polls.

The responsibility of the party cadre:

It has been noticed sadly that information concerning the life of the party and other aspects of political awareness and education never filters down to the grassroots militants. The case in point concerns especially resolutions arrived at during meetings of the National Executive Commission, NEC. There is ever such a yawning vacuum between the top and the grassroots such that the wards, for instance, do not see the need for calling meetings if they have no information to give to the militants. There is, therefore an urgent need to reactivate the information network of the party especially during this critical period of elections otherwise we still stand to lament only after damage has already been done.

This information about fighting electoral fraud is destined to all members of the SDF and necessary steps should be taken for the information to reach them. We are true democrats and we believe that if the polls were to be free, fair and transparent we would accept this outcome of any political consultation without any outcry.

Procedure for Counting of Votes

The procedure for the counting of votes is described below, check that it is followed properly.

- (a) Ballot boxes are opened and the number of envelopes contained in each ballot box are counted.
- (b) Each envelop is opened and the ballot paper inside is removed by an election official or scrutineer, unfolded, and handed to another election official or scrutineer who then calls out the name on the ballot paper.
- (c) The names of the lists or of the candidates are recorded by at least two scrutineers or election officials on specially prepared count tally sheets.
- (d) Ballot papers are declared to be either valid or invalid. If any envelop contains several ballot papers, the ballot papers shall be invalid if they bear different lists or names. Such ballot papers shall count as one vote where they bear the same name or list of candidates.
- (e) Ballot papers shall also be declared invalid if they:
 - Are not officially printed ballot papers
 - Contain any marks or signatures

- Are contained in envelopes which are not official
 - Are not contained in an envelop
- (f) The number of invalid ballot papers and envelopes are recorded on the polling station report.
- (g) Invalid ballot papers and envelopes and count tally sheets are attached to the polling station report.
- (h) The results are declared.
- (i) Any objections raised during counting are decided by the Local Polling Commission and recorded in the polling station report.
- (j) The results of the polls are entered on two copies of the polling station reports which are then signed by all members of the Local Polling Commission present.
- (k) The polling station report is handed to the Sub-Divisional Officer who verifies whether if it is acceptable. In the event of an error in procedure, he may request members of the Local Polling Commission to correct it.
- (l) The Sub-Divisional Officer completes a report which is attached to the report of the Local Polling Commission.
- (m) One copy of the reports is forwarded with all relevant documents to the Senior Divisional Officer, who then sends the reports and documents to the Divisional Supervisory Commission.
- (n) One copy of the report is kept in the archives of the Sub Divisional Office.

During the count, check the following:

- (a) That the recording of valid and invalid ballot papers is undertaken correctly.
- (b) That the sorting and counting of ballot papers is undertaken in transparent manner, clearly visible to candidate/party representatives, observers and voters.
- (c) That decisions regarding rejected or invalid ballots are consistent, and in accordance with the electoral law.
- (d) Whether any challenges by party/candidate representatives are dealt with in the correct manner.
- (e) Whether candidate/party representatives, observers and electors are permitted to make or were given copies of the results.
- (f) That the results are declared in the correct manner.
- (g) That after the count, all materials are dealt with in the correct manner.

If you are permitted to make copies of the result, do so. Carefully note the total number of registered voters, the total number of votes cast, and the total number of valid and invalid ballots.

If the number of electors or members of the Local Polling Commission who can read and write English or French is insufficient to ensure that the envelopes are checked and opened and that the votes are counted in a proper manner, the Chairman of the Polling Commission may take the ballot box to the Sub Divisional Office where the votes will be counted in the presence of the Sub Divisional Officer or his representative and members of the Local Polling Commission.

Some Points Concerning Elections Monitoring

Elections

- Registration: All concerned should ensure that all who are qualified should register (even opponents for you can never be sure where someone votes when he/she enters the ballot booth).
- Encourage all who have registered to come out and vote (especially your militants).
- Ensure each registered voter obtained his/her voter's card.

The Government (CPDM) plans to win councils now ruled by the SDF. We must work hard to keep them.

Role of all Elected Officials of the SDF

- Ensure full registration of all qualified voters.
- Ensure that all who have registered obtain and maintain in proper care their voter's card
- Ensure that all your militants who registered go to the polls.
- Above all, ensure you deliver your Constituency to the SDF.

Follow Up

- Have all SDF officials at the polling stations deposit their signature with those to control the results at the various levels.
- Control ballot boxes. Ensure they are not pre-stuffed. Make sure no ballot papers are stuck to the under cover of the ballot box.
- Be present at the polling station throughout the election. If you must move, have another representative to represent you.
- Obtained officially signed copies of results sheets which must as soon as possible be delivered to the officer in charge of the constituency office.

- Escort ballot boxes to their destination and be sure your representative at the controlling office is there when the boxes are delivered.
- At this point continue to defend your votes.
- Search, obtain and pass on useful information. No information is too small to be of use to your party.
- Be friendly for purposes of obtaining information. Receive, but do not disclose vital information.

The Role of Vanguard: Electoral Districts and Ward Chairpersons should make sure that each ward has the minimum number of Vanguard provided in the constitution.

The Ward should be shared out to Vanguard for purposes of election to carry out functions and directives spelt out above.