



## **OAS observes conclusion of the electoral cycle in Haiti**

On January 29, 2017 Haiti held for the first time in over 10 years elections for 570 local administration councils (CASEC), 568 local assemblies (ASEC) and 139 city delegates, in addition to the run-offs for eight senate and one lower chamber seats. While the Electoral Observation Mission of the Organization of American States (OAS/EOM) in Haiti commends the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) for the organization of a very complex election that posed important challenges, it expresses its concerns that few citizens chose to cast their vote resulting in a low turnout, especially in urban areas.

The Mission, headed by Uruguayan Ambassador Juan Raúl Ferreira, fielded a team of 77 observers and specialists from 21 countries who visited a total of 285 voting centers in all 10 departments of the country. All polling stations observed opened on time and had all the necessary materials for the voting. Observers also noted the presence of police forces and clearly identifiable electoral security agents, voting center supervisors and facilitators (orienteurs).

The Mission was pleased to observe the consolidation of the gains made during the November 20 elections, as well as additional improvements. However, authorities must remain vigilant as the OAS/EOM once again observed few cases of vote buying, electioneering, electoral violence, as well as discrepancies between the electoral lists displayed outside the polling stations and the lists used by the poll workers.

Adding to the complexity of this electoral process— over 31.000 candidates and 1,200 types of ballots—, these elections were organized under an outdated administrative map that does not reflect the present day territorial divisions of the country. OAS observers noted that in some areas this resulted in confusion as to the distribution of elective posts, with poll staffers and citizens not always knowing the type of authorities they were entitled to vote for. These mistakes were also highlighted by national observation groups. While the CEP tried to rectify this situation midway through the process, some voters were not able to exercise their full electoral rights. This was aggravated by the insufficient sensitization and voter education.

The OAS/EOM noted that measures have been taken to improve the tabulation process, including an increase in the number of workers at the Tabulation Center (CTV) and the introduction of new security features. OAS experts will be present at the CTV to observe if these measures enable for a faster and more efficient process.

The Mission was pleased to observe that the gender quota established by the electoral decree for political parties' lists of candidates was respected. However, women candidates and civil society representatives brought to the attention of the Mission the many barriers women still face to run for public office, including intimidation and scarce financial resources for campaigning. While some efforts have been done to provide safer conditions for the participation of women in politics, such as the CEP's helpline for women candidates and voters who feel threatened, there is still a lot of work ahead to guarantee the effectiveness of these measures and to implement other initiatives to promote their participation. As of today, there are only four women in the National Assembly.

The January 29 elections mark the end of an electoral cycle that began in 2015 and that the OAS has accompanied throughout, deploying a total of 504 observers. During the last two years, several key aspects of the electoral organization have been gradually improved, owing in big part to the institutionalization of the CEP and national ownership of the electoral process. Today Haitians can have more confidence in their electoral system. The Mission invites national stakeholders to build on this momentum and engage in substantial reforms, including the cleansing of the electoral list and revision of electoral legislation.

The renewal of all elective posts is an important milestone for the consolidation of democratic institutions in Haiti. It is now imperative for the newly elected officials to promptly take concrete actions to renew citizen's trust in the democratic exercise, by demonstrating the positive impact that their decisions have in the lives of their constituents and the population as a whole.

Finally, the Mission would like to thank the Government of Haiti for inviting the OAS to observe the 2017 legislative and local elections and for its support in enabling observers to carry out their tasks. The EOM also wishes to thank the governments of Canada, Chile, France, Mexico, Peru, the Philippines, Switzerland and the United States for their financial contributions that made possible the deployment of this Mission to Haiti, as well as UNDP and MINUSTAH for their support.