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Preliminary Review of Election Observation

PRESS STATEMENT

The first phase of local level elections, held after the promulgation of the new constitution, for the provinces number 3, 4, and 6 have been conducted with encouraging participation by the voters on May 14, 2017. Despite few obstructions and time constraints, the Election Commission has been generally successful in conducting the first phase of the local elections. It gave the general voters the opportunity to elect their representatives. Likewise, the political parties and the candidates, too, took part in the election actively. In this context, let us take this opportunity to state that in order to observe that the election was held in free, fair and credible manner the election observer organizations such as National Election Observer Organization (NEOC), General Election Observers Organization (GEOC) and Inclusive Women Alliance for Peace, Justice and Democracy (Sankalpa) were involved in the observation in a coordinated way.

Following are the major points of the preliminary results of our observation conducted before, during and after the polls.

1. Before Election

- The status of pre-poll management such as electoral rolls, staff management, party registration, code of conduct, printing of ballot paper and other logistics was satisfactory. However, there were some mistakes and weaknesses while preparing electoral rolls, monitoring of code of conduct and distribution of voters' ID.
- Due to time constraints and weakness in management, the voters' education could not be effective. Voters were in confusion about where and how to vote.
- Even as elections continue to become more expensive, women candidates faced more difficulties in carrying out healthy campaign. On the other hand the pregnant and nursing women, sick and disabled women suffered because of inappropriate placing of polling centers.

2. Observance of Silent Period

- In general, the rule of silent period of 48 hours preceding the polling date was found to have been abided by the parties, candidates and concerned persons but some candidates did try to entice voters during this period too and the social media could not be fully disciplined. So, there were some weaknesses

3. During Election

- The management of necessary materials during the polling day was satisfactory, by and large. All materials were transported and stored in the polling centers well before the polling day. But in few centers, there were incidents of destruction and looting of election materials

- Queue of voters were largely well-managed. There were separate queues for men and women, and special arrangements were made for people with special needs. However, many polling centers were not disabled-friendly and not accessible to all.
- Deployment of staffs and volunteers were satisfactory. However, due to lack of training and uniformity, there were lack of coordination in some centers.
- Most polling centers opened on time. But in some places, they opened one hour late. Some centers were closed for some time due to disputes.
- Most polling centers closed on time. But there were delays in some. Nevertheless, voters already in queue at 5 pm were allowed to vote

4. Security Situation:

- Like in the past elections, this time, too, there were three rings of security. It generated sense of security among voters. Despite that, there were dozens of incidents of violence. Some people even lost their lives. There were dozens of incidents of vandalism, arson, explosion, abduction and clashes.

5. Recommendations:

- Since the process of voting is complicated and the voters are not familiar with the large size of ballot paper, there should be effective voters' education. It should be particularly targeted at first time voters and illiterate voters. Encouraging NGOs, media, professionals, academics and other relevant institutions in voters' education would be an effective way of doing so.
- The existing design of ballot paper should be reformed so that they are more voter-friendly in future elections.
- Vote-counting exercise has been found to be tedious, complicated and time/resource-intensive. Alternative methods should be immediately adopted to ensure fast counting and results
- Special security arrangement should be put in place in security-sensitive areas for the upcoming second phase of polls
- There should be better arrangement and availability of facilities for women, and senior citizens in the polling centers from the perspective of security, ease and sensitivity
- In order to address the weaknesses in the enforcement of code of conduct, the political parties, candidates and party workers should mainly be made answerable, and the Election Commission should make the monitoring of the violation of the code more effective.

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