

2

SUBMISSION TO PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON NGE2022

FROM: WOMEN CANDIDATES MS PHOEBE SANGETARI, MS JEAN EPARO PARKOP AND MRS DELILAH GORE

TO: CHAIRMAN, SPECIAL PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON 2022 NATIONAL GENERAL ELECTIONS

DATE: 18TH APRIL, 2023

SUBJECT: WOMEN CANDIDATES VIEWS ON 2022 NATIONAL GENERAL ELECTIONS

We, the three women candidates from Northern Province, submit to the committee our observations on 2022 National Elections. Ms Sangtari and Ms Eparo Parkop contested Northern Regional Seat. Mrs Gore contested Sohe Open Seat. Several other women contested both Open and Regional Seats.

From the outset, we wish to thank the PNG Electoral Commission for conducting the elections despite tough challenges faced.

Our Submission contains positive and negative statements based on our own experiences as women candidates. It is ordered according to the various stages of election: Preparatory, Campaign, Polling, Counting Stages and General Observations. It is our intention and hope that our reported experiences will contribute to improving management of future elections to achieve FREE, FAIR and SAFE elections for Northern Province and Papua New Guinea in general.

PREPARATORY STAGE:

1. **2022 COMMON ROLL UPDATE:** Common Roll update was done late. This resulted in unavailability of Hard Copies. Candidates were told to check online for their voters' names. This was impossible for many parts of the province due to network coverage problems. Many people went to polling without prior confirmation of their names on the Common Rolls, resulting in some turned away from voting.
In some polling booths, 2017 Common Roll was used so there was no uniformity in the Common rolls used.
In 2012 and 2017, Common Roll was ready so candidates made copies to check their voters' names
2. **VOTER EDUCATION:** Election is a serious business. Voters must be educated on Leadership Qualities and Preferential Voting. We did not see or hear about coordinated awareness and education program by the Electoral Office and Department of Oro.
3. **PREPARATION OF ELECTION OFFICIALS AND SCRUTINEERS:** Election officers are important people who conduct the elections. They must be selected on Merits and

trained. Scrutineers are representatives of Candidates. They too must be prepared well for their roles. Candidates were not aware of program for preparation of election officials and scrutineers. Scrutineer briefing and training by the election Manager were done on adhoc and on short notices. Many scrutineers missed out. To date, we are still not aware of PROCESS AND CRITERIA used for selecting election officials.

4. QUALITY CHECKS OF BALLOT PAPERS BEFORE DISTRIBUTION TO POLLING BOOTHS: This was carried out by some scrutineers and Election Officers. This is a positive sign of cooperation between election officials and candidates. It must continue in the future election. However, it needs to be properly coordinated so ensure that appropriate scrutineers check the Ballot papers going to their wards and LLGs.
5. PROVINCIAL ELECTORAL OFFICE: was not manned adequately by qualified officers. Front desk help was given by casuals or temporary officers, resulting in many instances of unanswered queries.
6. CHANGE IN NOMINATION DATES caused uncertainties and confusions over the new dates.

CAMPAIGN STAGE:

1. CAMPAIGN PERIOD: 8 weeks is too short for regional candidates. In 2022 NGE it was reduced to less than 8 weeks resulting in regional candidates unable to cover the electorate to campaign.
2. SECURITY: Security for candidates especially women candidates was not an issue. Communities were receptive to women candidates.

POLLING STAGE:

1. Delayed Updating of Common Roll resulted in many people turned away from voting because their names were not on the common Roll
2. Change of Dates caused confusions
3. Lack of understanding on quality leadership affects quality of leaders voted in to Parliament. Voters decisions are affected more by factors other than their assessment of candidates on their possession of leadership qualities
4. Security of Polling Boxes: Plastic boxes are not secure so they can be easily broken and tags can be changed. Furthermore, the space under the handle is big enough for extra ballot papers to be squeezed in
5. Some ballot boxes were transported long distances, at times, taking days to arrive at provincial headquarters, after polling
6. Some Polling Teams and Ballot Boxes travelled by foot and arrived late at the Polling Booths
7. Alleged election offences during polling were not addressed either by Election Manager or Provincial Police Commander. Some of these offences were reported to the police station. OB Numbers were obtained. It is still not addressed yet.

8. On the positive side The Boxes are Transparent so it's easy to see the color of the ballot papers
9. Separate Polling Lines for women was a good idea. Women felt free to vote.

COUNTING

1. Counting arrangements were announced a day before the actual counting started.
2. Orokaiva Market was selected as the new Counting venue and set up late. Counting was delayed for two days and rushed through later
3. Counting for 3 open electorates and regional electorate were done in the same place causing chaos and confusion
4. Counting was not audible to the candidates and voters
5. Broadcast by NBC Northern was delayed by a day. Candidates could not monitor their progressive results correctly.
6. Tally Board was not present until a few days later. There was only one Tally Board so we could not tell whose scores were on the Tally Board.
7. Polling Officials alleged to have committed election offences during polling were still engaged as counting officials, despite requests to Election Manager to suspend them from election duties
8. Candidates scrutineers were seated at some distance away from the Counting Tables that made it difficult for them to confirm the names of the candidates and signatures of appropriate Presiding Officers, on the Ballot Papers that were announced by the callers
9. In many instances counting was done without the presence of scrutineers
10. Scrutineers concerns were not addressed adequately. They were actually intimidated, threatened and told to shut up by election officials including the Election Manager and security personnel and were told to tell their candidates to take the matters to Court of Disputed Returns. This is unlike in some other provinces where Scrutineers concerns were addressed and those officials alleged to have committed election offences were charged.
11. There were two containers at counting venue at the beginning of the counting. Towards the middle of counting a Third Container was added without explanation to scrutineers and candidates and voters present at the counting.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

1. PROVINCIAL ELECTION STEERING COMMITTEE: Candidates had issues with Transparency and Impartiality of this Committee. Candidates were not clear about how they were conducting their business because our concerns and complaints raised firstly through a petition then later through a letter to the Election Manager were not addressed adequately. Two complaints were filed at the Police Station. OB Numbers was given, one of which is 209/07, dated 24th July, 2022. To date it has not been addressed yet. The Election Manager and Provincial Police Commander are members of the Provincial Steering Committee.

2. **ELECTION PETITIONS:** There were over one hundred election Petitions filed after this election- 2022 NGE in all over the country. Northern Province has two. This questions the management of election and especially the declaration of winners. It confirms our statement made at the Women Candidate's Election Diagnostic workshop held at Holiday Inn, in September, 2022, together with 36 other women candidates, that this election was the most disorganized and problematic election, in the history of elections in Papua New Guinea.
3. **QUALIFICATION AND ELIGIBILITY OF CANDIDATES:** Current eligibility criteria for candidates is such that it does not help in getting people who have the credentials to contest in elections and serve as national members of Parliament when they win. This was shown by the caliber of candidates who contested in the three Open and Regional Electorates in Northern Province. Some of them did not even know the role and function of a Member of Parliament. Others had questionable background/ record too, including people who were found guilty by Court of Disputed Returns. This is a serious issue which needs to be addressed, if PNG is to have credible members of parliament.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Given the above observations, we recommend the following:

1. Preparations for National Elections to begin as soon as the other one ends. Preparations for 2027 National Elections should begin this year.
2. Provincial and National Governments to conduct voter education on leadership Qualities and Prudential Voting a year before elections
3. Common Roll update to be completed more than six (6) month before the elections
4. Selection of election officials to be based on merits and done transparently.
5. Alleged Election offences to be addressed and people involved suspended immediately and barred from participating in future election related duties and as contesting in elections
6. PSIPs and DSIPs to be ceased one year before election
7. Review Candidates criteria to include qualifications and other background information
8. People with criminal records and those who have been found guilty at the Court of disputed returns to be banned permanently from contesting in elections.
9. Provincial Steering Committee and its members to be impartial, visible and transparent during elections