

NEWS LETTER

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Support to Universal Suffrage Elections
in the Federal Republic of Somalia

UNDP / UNSOM Integrated Electoral Support Group (IESG) to the Federal Republic of Somalia

IESG News Updates

NIEC speech to Parliament – accomplishments and challenges



The Chairperson NIEC addressing to the House of People highlighting the Commission's accomplishments and readiness for the 2020 elections. Mogadishu, 17 April 2019. (Photo credit: NIEC)

On 17 April, the Chairperson of the National Independent Electoral Commission (NIEC) addressed the House of the People with an update on the preparations for the federal parliamentary elections by late 2020. The Chairperson highlighted the following Commission's accomplishments:

- ◆ Establishment of NIEC offices in all the federal member states, recruitment of staff both in NIEC headquarter and FMS, staff skills' development on management and administration of election related programs, preparation for the development of electoral rules, regulations, procedures and policies, and electoral planning that directs the election management programs.
- ◆ Issuance of temporary registration certificates for 43 political parties, and the Commission's observation visits of the offices of some temporary registered political parties, in order to check the requirements as indicated in political party law.
- ◆ Decision on the type of voter registration: electronic registration with facial recognition features. The Commission selected this method because of its simplicity, integrity and price.

- ◆ Satellite image exploration on the places that could be potential voter registration locations to register the voters.
 - ◆ Successful conduct of by-elections to fill vacant seats in the parliament.
- The NIEC underscored that the completion of the electoral law is the foundation of all election programmes that will facilitate the NIEC to prepare and implement voter registration, election management and voter education regulations as well as regulations on resolution of election disputes. The Chair reiterated that the Commission has limited office space, and underscored the need to construct a headquarters building with sufficient offices and storage facilities for data information and equipment, as well as to set up permanent NIEC offices in federal member states.
- The Commission reviewed its five-year strategic plan, including a budgetary timeframe. From the government, the NIEC has received budget for the salaries, which have always been paid on time since 2017. Besides some limited funding for operational costs, the NIEC has been allocated a budget to conduct its constitutional duties on election programmes.

Highlights

- ◆ 15 April: NIEC-IESG electoral information sharing meeting
- ◆ 17 April: NIEC speech to Parliament – accomplishments and challenges
- ◆ 22-23 April: High-level workshop on building trust and electoral integrity in difficult electoral contexts
- ◆ 22-23 April: BRIDGE course: 'Training of Master Trainers'
- ◆ 24 April: NIEC meeting with senior South-West State ministers
- ◆ 28 April: Conduct of by-election in Baidoa
- ◆ 29 April: Workshop on gender equality in elections
- ◆ 2 May: NIEC and IESG discussion with international partners on voter registration methodology
- ◆ 17 May: Launch of EoI to identify potential vendors for VR procurement
- ◆ 7 May: Start of identification of potential voter registration sites in Jowhar and Hirshabelle, followed by Benadir on 20 May
- ◆ 20 May: Presentation of draft Electoral Bill to Parliament
- ◆ 25-26 May: NIEC consultation meeting with civil society organizations on Voter Education regulations

With regard to electoral security, it is necessary to secure the safety and security of voter registration centers and polling stations. To achieve this, the Government needs to establish with the NIEC a joint Election Security Taskforce, to prepare a security and safety plan for voter registration and elections in 2020.

The Chair emphasized that in order to conduct the elections, it is important to have political consensus and agreements between the country's leaders including the Federal Government, Federal Member States, civil society, political parties and all other stakeholders. She underscored that collaboration is required amongst all key stakeholders to move the country to multi-party and democratic elections.

Submission of Electoral Bill to Parliament, proposed amendments to the Political Party Law

On 2 May, the Council of Ministers endorsed the draft electoral bill, developed in 2018 by the Ministry of Interior, Federal Affairs and Reconciliation (MofFAR). The endorsed draft bill includes some new elements compared to the earlier versions to which IESG provided technical assistance, and others provided comments. In addition, the FGS proposed amendments to the Political Party Law. One notable change was the need for 10,000 signatures of 'eligible' voters (instead of registered voters) from at least 9 of the 18 regions (that existed before 1991) as a requirement

for political parties to become officially registered. The National Independent Electoral Commission (NIEC) was present in Garowe to provide FMS leaders clarifications on the planning for 'one person, one vote' elections and the technical aspects as stipulated in the current draft electoral bill. As the Garowe meeting between the FGS and FMS did not result in an agreement, the Prime Minister urged the FMS leaders to convey their comments on the bill through the FMS representatives in the Upper House.

On 20 May, the Minister of Interior

presented the Electoral Bill to the members of the House of the People. The Speaker of the House requested the Parliamentary Committee for Interior and Security to *inter alia* discuss compliance of the Electoral Bill with the Provisional Constitution. IESG discussed with the NIEC the latest adjustments in the draft bill and requested the NIEC to share with the Parliamentary Committee certain technical recommendations and comments that would strengthen the electoral legal framework.

NIEC-IESG electoral information sharing meeting



NIEC-IESG monthly electoral information sharing meeting. Mogadishu, 15 April 2019 (Photo credit: IESG)

On 15 April, the NIEC and the UNSOM co-chaired an electoral information sharing meeting for international stakeholders

and electoral assistance providers.

The NIEC Chair Halima Ismail gave an update on progress made and preparations to hold the 2020 general elections in Somalia, in particular on its decision for a sound biometric voter registration methodology.

The NIEC Chair also discussed civic and voter education programmes, voter registration, review of the political party's law and enactment of the electoral law. She stressed this year and next year are crucial for the Commission to fulfil its mandate.

The information sharing meeting was followed by a Board Meeting with NIEC, UNDP/IESG and donor partners.

NIEC selected voter registration methodology - procurement of voter registration equipment

IESG and the NIEC organized on 2 May an additional meeting with international partners to elaborate on the NIEC's decision of a voter registration methodology that is electronic and contains a photo for deduplication purposes. The NIEC explained the different options they considered and why the selected methodology was eventually decided upon, given its relative simplicity, price and integrity, compared to other methodologies in the context of Somalia. As voters ideally should spend as little time as possible in the registration centers given security concerns, voter registration procedures and the used technology have to be as intuitive and simple as possible to avoid a time-

consuming registration process. Key partners welcomed the adopted model.

On 17 May, UNDP launched an international call for expression of interest of vendors so that NIEC and UNDP can identify and prequalify potential suppliers for the voter registration equipment (http://procurement-notices.undp.org/view_notice.cfm?notice_id=55797). Exact specifications for the voter registration kits are to be defined and the invitations to bid will be subsequently sent to prequalified vendors in the next months.

Once there is a clearer idea on the number of voter registration sites through the field

verification exercise, NIEC and IESG will develop a comprehensive budget for the process.

Resource mobilization for voter registration will further be informed by the donors' stock-taking on the country's general progress for electoral preparations. Voter registration is planned to start in March 2020. Funding for voter registration kits need to be available by late November 2019 to allow for procurement of the voter registration kits by early December 2019 to have the kits ready for the March 2020 voter registration exercise.

High-level workshop on building trust and electoral integrity in difficult electoral contexts



Judge J. Kriegler briefed NIEC on building trust and electoral integrity in difficult electoral contexts. Mogadishu, 22-23 April 2019. (Photo credit: NIEC)

As a means to strengthen South-South cooperation, IESG invited Judge Johann Kriegler, former Chair of South Africa's Independent Electoral Commission and renowned senior international electoral expert and jurist, to speak to the Commissioners of the NIEC at a high-level workshop on 22-23 April in Mogadishu on building trust in a politically difficult and violent electoral environment, as well as on principles of electoral dispute resolution.

Judge Kriegler spoke of the importance of the role of the Commissioners to engage with key electoral stakeholders, particularly political leaders, to ensure that there is overall political buy-in to key decisions the NIEC makes. He also emphasized the importance of transparency of the electoral management body itself, to increase trust in the electoral process. On electoral dispute resolution, he recommended that electoral complaints dealing with facts be

dealt with at the local level where the complaints emanate from, and avoid pushing up complaints to a higher/central level where it is difficult to ascertain those facts in dispute; only disputes over principle should be brought up to the central/HQ level. Overall, he recommended that practical solutions be found to electoral complaints, rather than resolving matters "too legalistically", so that complaints can be dealt with swiftly.

BRIDGE course: 'Training of Master Trainers'



Conduct of BRIDGE training of the master trainers Mogadishu, 22-23 April 2019 (Photo credit: IESG)

To strengthen the NIEC's institutional capacity and electoral knowledge, IESG organized 'training of master trainers' (part 2)

workshop with the NIEC on 6-10 April. After an initial session in March, the second phase of the course took place in

Mogadishu in April with the assistance of international BRIDGE (Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections) trainers.

NIEC staff have been trained on modules that elaborates on the system of master trainers, the mechanics of cascade training, knowledge transfer, skills development and quality assurance.

During voter registration and later during elections, the NIEC's field operations will comprise thousands of temporary election workers, and these workshops are aimed at training them properly in a very short time with limited resources.

Workshop on gender equality in elections



Group photo participants of workshop on gender equality in elections Mogadishu, 29 April 2019 (Photo credit: NIEC)

On 29 and 30 April, the NIEC participated in a workshop in Mogadishu on gender equality in elections, organized by the Swedish Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) and assisted by UNDP Somalia.

In preparations for next year's elections, the NIEC strives towards gender empowerment and an increase in women's role in elections

as candidates, voters and electoral officers.

The Swedish Ambassador to Somalia underscored Sweden's support to gender mainstreaming. In addition to representatives from the NIEC, the workshop was attended by women MPs from both Houses, who all participated in the plenary discussion.

Identification of potential voter registration sites

In May, the NIEC, with IESG assistance, commenced the field exercise to identify potential voter registration sites in Benadir, Hirshabelle and South-West. The NIEC is reaching out to the other FMS to start the field identification in those regions soon. In this respect, NIEC Commissioners traveled to Galmadug on 28 May to engage with the authorities to start the field identification exercise. Information on the number and locations of the potential voter registration centres will feed into the NIEC's operations plan. The list of these potential voter registration centres will need to also be vetted by the security services. Once approved by the Board of Commissioners, NIEC will inform donors on the required budget for voter registration and timely procurement of voter registration kits.

NIEC consultation meeting with civil society organizations on Voter Education regulations



NIEC consultations with civil society organizations on voter education regulations, Mogadishu, 25-26 May. (Photo credit: NIEC)

On 25 and 26 May, the NIEC's Department of Outreach and Voter

Education held a two-day consultation with Civil Society Organizations (CSO) on

a regulation for voter education. The regulation will help the NIEC and CSOs work together to deliver voter education and public awareness.

The consultation meeting was officially opened by NIEC Chair, Ms. Halima Ismail. Other Commissioners were also present. The NIEC emphasized on the need to collaborate with CSOs to conduct outreach programs. Participants include women groups, youth, religious leaders, people with disabilities, and representatives from international organizations.

NIEC meeting with senior South-West State ministers



NIEC Chairperson with the senior South-West State minister Baidoa, 24 April 2019 (Photo credit: NIEC)

In April, the NIEC Chairperson met with the South-West State President and discussed the identification of voter registration sites in preparation for the voter registration process for the 2020 universal suffrage elections.

The NIEC also held meetings with senior South-West state ministers (Security, Internal Affairs and Education) and discussed the

preparation for the voter registration exercise, seeking their cooperation on provision of information on potential voter registration sites and on the field verification exercise. IESG provided logistic support to the NIEC's travel to South-West State.

The South-West State Minister for Security assured the NIEC officials of his Ministry's commitment to assist the

Electoral Commission in identifying the centres for the voter registration exercise.

NIEC awarded certificates to three newly elected MPs from Baidoa

On 2 May 2019, the NIEC awarded certificates to three newly elected Baidoa MPs at the Commission headquarters in Mogadishu.

The MPs were elected following three by-elections conducted in Baidoa, South-West State. The three MPs who were awarded certificates are Hon. Ali Sheikh Abdulahi, Hon. Nur Sidow Baba Hassan and Hon. Ali Adow Mohammed.

The newly elected MPs are scheduled to take oath of office before they fully start discharging their parliamentary duties.



NIEC awarding certificate to a newly elected MP Baidoa, 24 April 2019 (Photo credit: NIEC)



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