

**Presidential Election of Sri Lanka – November 2005**  
**International Election Observation Mission of PAFFREL**

**GUIDELINES FOR ELECTION OBSERVATION**

PAFFREL would like to convey its heartfelt thanks to you for volunteering to be an international election observer. The purpose of this paper is to give a clear understanding of your role and some critical issues related to monitoring elections. As a non-partisan international election observer you will play a very important role in the democratic process of Sri Lanka. As international observers you must be dedicated to the idea of free and fair elections that will allow the people of Sri Lanka to choose a legitimate government. And undoubtedly your presence will increase the neutrality and credibility of PAFFREL in this election observation process.

**WHO IS AN ELECTION OBSERVER?**

Election observers play an important role in the pursuit of democratic elections. An election observer is a part of the process that ensures that elections have the following minimal conditions:

- Franchise is genuinely universal
- Political parties and candidates enjoy the right to legitimately take part in the election
- Freedom of expression that allows possible criticism of the incumbent government
- Freedom of assembly
- Access to the media by all political parties and candidates
- Genuine freedom of choice for voters

Election observers observe electoral process as it takes place to make an informed and accurate assessment on both the conduct of elections and the surrounding environment. Basically three phases of the election, namely pre-election period, election day and post-election period can be observed through a comprehensive mission.

The use of election observers can provide an effective means of verifying the integrity and fairness of the electoral process. In addition, the presence of observers will create an atmosphere that decreases the likelihood of intimidation and/or fraud. Especially the presence of international election observers would create a satisfactory election environment.

Well planned election observation missions can increase voter confidence and increase their ability to freely express their political will at the polls without fear of reprisal.

It is essential that observers come from non-partisan organizations with proven records as well as professional and ethical capacity in areas related to the technicality of electoral processes and the promotion of democracy. After the deployment, as STOs, you may not give a country-wide picture to media in the district, but about the district where you deployed.

We mobilized international election observers with reliable professional background in the field of election administering and monitoring, academia, human rights, media, religious organizations or law.

Please read the Code of Conduct for International Observers and Dos and Dont's which will be available on your docket.

## **MANDATE OF THE MISSION**

There is a clear distinction between the mandate of a supervisory mission, a monitoring mission and an observation mission. A supervisory mission is in control of electoral process and has administrative and executive power. Monitoring missions have a mandate to interfere should the electoral process derails. The mandate of an observation mission rules out any kind of interference. The observation mission has no authority to change, improve or correct any shortcomings in electoral process during the election period. The observation mission only has the mandate to collect and verify information concerning election-related issues, to analyse the observations and to publish its observations including assessing the findings against international standards for free and fair elections and make recommendations. PAFFREL has the observation mission mandate. However, PAFFREL observers (both local and international) have received the accreditation from the Commissioner of Elections that enables us to enter and stay polling stations any time during the voting. Moreover, PAFFREL stationary observers shall provide a report to the chairman of the respective polling stations at the end of voting. They will provide the information of the voting process in a special report format provided by the Election Commission.

The objective of this mission can be listed as follows:

## **WHAT TO OBSERVE?**

Balloting and vote counting processes usually form the focal point of election observation. Nevertheless, election observers should also be active in examining other aspects of the electoral process such as the appointment of electoral officers, the registration of candidates and voters, the enforcement of election campaign regulations, the conduct of voting and vote counting, the review of complaints and the installation of election winners. The State and the media should also be scrutinized given their potential for improperly using resources and status to manipulate the electoral process and influence election outcomes. As short-term observers (STOs) you will have very little period of pre-election

observation. You will be able to observe the last date of election campaign (on 14<sup>th</sup> November) in your district. But, the cooling period (on 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> November), where election campaign is prohibited is another important period for you to observe. The most important day for STOs is the election day and it will be your hardworking day. In this mission we don't expect you to observe the post election period, particularly the counting process.

## **PRE-ELECTION PERIOD**

You will be deployed to the district either on 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> November. Before be deployed you will study thoroughly the election laws, regulations and political context. And also some basic information and statistics about the district you deploy. Don't forget your interpreter will play a key role for your successful observation. Make sure you develop a good rapport with him/her. When you get in to the districts, consider the following:

- Meet PAFFREL representatives in the districts and keep in touch with them throughout the observation period.
- Meet with related officers including Police and representatives of monitoring organizations in deployment areas to discuss about the environment of the election, the preparation for the electoral process and problems that are encountered and anticipated
- Meet with representatives of political parties in the deployment area
- Collect information to examine and verify whether any reasonable ground for the misuse of power by members of the authority, particularly those in charge of the electoral process, in favour or against certain candidates directly and indirectly. This investigation should also include information regarding activities of the media and members of the authority, particularly those in charge of electoral process, whether they have involved in political campaigns, in soliciting political support or in canvassing for certain candidates
- Observe campaign rallies and other political events during campaign period.
- Be vigilant on any kind of election campaigns during the cooling period.
- Locate constituencies and polling stations to be observed. Review the setting up of these polling stations, the secure storage and the transport of election materials.

## **ELECTION DAY**

### **1.1 Prior to the opening of the polling station**

Election observers should arrive at the first polling station no later than 6.30 a.m. to observe the preparation for the opening of the voting process. They should wear observer Identification cards clearly displayed all the time. Not

only that, you will get a P-cap, a jacket, an arm band that you have to wear while observing. Because those are the tool that public and officials can identify you as PAFFREL international election observer. The first task in every polling station is to introduce themselves to polling station chairman.

It is advisable for observers to spend a minimum of 30 minutes in each polling station, taking into consideration the travel time between polling stations. We don't ask you to cover certain number of polling stations. Because you may stay 15-60 min. in one station depending on the voting environment you feel.

Prior to the opening of voting, election observers should note whether:

- All required electoral officers including security officers are present and fully aware of their duties. They follow all procedures for the setting up and opening of the polling station
- Other national or international election observers are present
- All documents have been carefully verified and signed in accordance with laws and procedures governing electoral process
- Election materials. Particularly voter lists, ballot papers, ballot boxes and seals have been carefully secured. Serial numbers on ballot paper stubs are recorded. Seals are checked.
- Ballot boxes are shown to be empty before being locked and sealed in accordance with laws, regulations and procedures governing electoral process
- Adequate security for the polling station has been provided
- Queues of voters waiting for the opening of the polling station are orderly
- The polling station opens on time, 7.00 a.m.

## **1.2 At the polling station during voting hours**

The first task in every polling station is to introduce themselves to security officers and polling station chairman. You may also introduce yourself to accredited observers and party agents. PAFFREL stationary observers that you will find inside the polling station will be a good source for you to learn what happened in the polling station before you arrived.

Election observers must ensure that their activities do not disrupt the voting process in any way when they visit each polling station and talk with others. Without creating distraction, conversation with electoral officers, local observers and party agents should be made to get their views on voting process. Please read the letter issued by the Commissioner of Elections for Election observers. (you will find it in your docket)

Election observers should note the presence of campaign materials and efforts to solicit votes as well as any inappropriate instruction for voting in or near the polling station. Election observers must note whether the organization and progress of voting process have been in accordance with laws, regulations and procedures governing electoral process.

Election observers should note any sign of tension or dissension. They should note how polling station officers deal with voters whose names do not appear on voter lists and whether the handling of these incidents has been proceeded in accordance with laws, regulations and procedures governing electoral process. Keep records of the name / index number of the polling station and the time you arrived there.

Election observers should determine whether there is any reasonable grounds to believe irregularities are taking place such as:

- Infringement of secrecy
- Possession of weapons inside and around polling stations by unauthorized armed people that create fearful environment for voters.
- Disturbance and obstruction of voting process
- Undue influence or bribery of electoral officers
- Chasing away the party agents and voters.
- Impersonation or voting with a false identity
- Multiple voting and rotating of ballots for vote casting
- Incitement of violence

Election observers may also find it useful to determine the average time it takes a voter to enter and leave the polling station. If election observers find out the number of voters who have already voted and the number of voters waiting to vote, it may be possible to determine whether all eligible voters will be able to vote before the official closing of the polling station. You may note down how many ballots cast by the time you visited the polling station.

Don't forget you observe not only inside the polling station, but also the surrounding environment. Especially, area nearby the polling station and the road nearby. Some malpractices and irregularities can occur outside the stations.

### **1.3 The closing of the polling station**

Election observers should determine the polling station that they will observe the closing procedures at. Since the polling station should close by 4.00 p.m. it is advisable you to be there at least by 3.50 p.m. When arriving at the polling station, they should look to see if there is a queue of voters. They should also note any sign of tension or dissension. You shall note down number of eligible votes in the station and the cast vote by the time of closing.

Election observers must record whether the polling station is closed at the official closing time, they should determine whether there is a late opening of the polling station or there is a suspension in voting during voting hours or voting hours are extended to allow voters in the queue to vote.

Election observers must note whether the closing of the polling station has been proceeded in accordance with laws, regulations and procedures governing electoral process. Ballot boxes must be sealed and secured. Election observers should check whether the handling of all election materials, including unused ballot papers has been in accordance with laws and procedures. If it is possible you shall follow the ballot boxes to the counting center. But you are not entitled to enter the counting center.

## **POST-ELECTION OBSERVATION**

Unfortunately, this time our STOs not expected to do a comprehensive post-election observation, but to return Colombo as soon as possible for the de-briefing. But, before you return to Colombo send your report by fax or e-mail to us on the election day.

## **REPORTING AND DEBRIEFING**

As soon as you finished your election day observation, send the summary report to PAFFREL by fax. Because PAFFREL will issue an election-day communiqué by 7.00 p.m. your observation report is needed for that. The reporting format will be given to you before the deployment. You will learn more about the reporting format during the briefing. When you arrived Colombo you will give a de-briefing for 10 min. The de-briefing shall start on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2.00 p.m. onwards. If you have more reports and findings, you will handover them to the secretariat team, which we will use for our final report. During the de-briefing you will explain your major findings and concern. PAFFREL wants your views about the elections to refer on the press conference that will be held on 19<sup>th</sup> November.