



ELECTORAL OBSERVATION MISSION FINAL REPORT

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GENERAL ELECTIONS

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

December 9, 2015

Electoral Observation Missions (EOMs)
Department for Electoral Cooperation and Observation (DECO)
Secretariat for Strengthening Democracy (SSD)
Organization of American States (OAS)



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General Elections in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines December 9, 2015

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On November 13, 2015, the Organization of American States received an invitation from the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines requesting an Electoral Observation Mission to the General Elections to be held on December 9, 2015.

Ambassador Jacinth Henry Martin, then Chief of Staff to the Secretary General, served as Chief of Mission and was assisted by Mr. Paul Spencer, Special Advisor in the Secretariat for Strengthening Democracy, as Deputy Chief of Mission. The Mission met with the leadership of the four political parties contesting the elections, the Supervisor of Elections and various stakeholders. Likewise, the observers attended several party rallies and other campaign activities before the election.

The Electoral Observer Mission was comprised of 13 observers from 11 OAS Member States (Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Barbados, Ecuador, Guyana, Jamaica, Mexico, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago, and the United States). Deployment of the Mission commenced on December 3 with the arrival of some members of the Mission's Core Group. The Chief and Deputy Chief of Mission as well as other members of the Mission's Core Group arrived on December 4. International Observers arrived a couple of days later and participated in a day of training, familiarizing themselves with their duties and with the electoral districts where they would be deployed. The training session included a briefing by staff of the Supervisor of Elections.

On Election Day, Wednesday December 9, the Mission deployed to 14 of the country's 15 constituencies, visiting 74 percent of the polling stations during the day. In general, the electoral process in St. Vincent

and the Grenadines was well-managed. Observers witnessed the on time opening of all monitored polling stations, and noted the availability of requisite materials, the presence of polling officials, and long lines of voters who patiently waited to exercise their franchise in the early morning. Voter participation reached a historic high of 74%.

The presiding officers, poll clerks, party agents and police worked harmoniously throughout the long day, helping citizens to find their polling stations and ensuring an organized and peaceful environment. Observers witnessed the counting of ballots and the transmission of results, which was concluded in large measure within two hours of the closure of the polls. In some instances, observers returned more than once to several polling stations to observe the progress of events throughout the day. Preliminary results were available on the evening of the elections and ballot boxes were transported to the returning officers for the final counting of votes the following day in all 15 constituencies. A small team of observers witnessed the final count in one of the constituencies.

The final results confirmed that the Unity Labour Party (ULP) won eight seats and the New Democratic Party (NDP) seven.

While the conduct of the election was without any major incident, the Mission identified some areas where the election process could have been improved. These are outlined in the conclusions and recommendations of the report below.

The Mission would like to express its gratitude to Argentina, South Korea, Spain and the United States for providing crucial financial support for this Mission.

CHAPTER I - BACKGROUND AND NATURE OF THE MISSION

A. Background and Nature of the Mission

The Electoral Observation Missions (EOMs) of the Organization of American States (OAS) have become an essential tool for the promotion and the defense of democracy in the continent. OAS/EOMs promote the right to vote and to be elected in an inclusive, free and transparent manner as well as the importance of respecting the will of citizens, expressed at the polls.

The presence of OAS observation missions (OAS/EOMs) represents the solidarity and support of the Inter-American community for the efforts of the democratic institutions of States to administer their own electoral processes.

Since 1962, the OAS has observed more than 237 elections in the hemisphere, although election observation methodology has developed considerably during the last 15 years. In recent years, the OAS has observed many different elections at the request of the Member States, including general, presidential, parliamentary and local elections, referendums, collection of signatures and validation processes and political party primaries.

The OAS has established, as part of its methodology about electoral observation, four dimensions to have specific substantive elements of evaluation of any electoral process, namely:

- Inclusive elections
- Clean elections
- Competitive elections
- Effective Public Officers

In order to comply with these criterion or indicators it is necessary to go beyond Election Day. The majority of actions that enable us to know these dimensions are performed before or after Election Day, the latter being a reflection of an application of these indicators. In this sense, these criteria or indicators will be utilized for the development of this document and the support of contents herein is found in mixed sources of information. This means that information is derived from data generated in the field and others come from official publications.

With regards to St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the OAS has observed General Elections in 2001, 2005 and 2010 and the Referendum on Constitutional Reform of 2009.

In an exchange of correspondence, the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines invited the Organization of American States to deploy an Electoral Observation Mission to observe the General Elections held on December 9, 2015. The OAS responded positively to this request and the Department of Electoral Cooperation and Observation was directed to prepare an Electoral Observation Mission to witness the electoral process.

Ambassador Jacinth Henry Martin, then Chief of Staff to the Secretary General, served as Chief of Mission. On November 30, 2015 the OAS Secretary General signed the Agreement of Privileges and Immunities with the Interim Permanent Representative of St. Vincent and the

Grenadines to the OAS, Omari Williams. On December 4, Ambassador Henry-Martin signed the Agreement of Electoral Guarantees with the Supervisor of Elections, Ms. Sylvia Findlay-Scrubb.

On Election Day, OAS Observers witnessed the voting throughout the State, in 14 of the 15 constituencies. Observers visited 173 of the 232 polling stations multiple times during the day, interviewing presiding officers, poll clerks, party agents, police officers, and members of the public, regarding their experiences of the run-up to the election, the preparations for polling and the conduct of the elections. They remained for the closing of the polls and observed the counting of ballots. Observers recorded their general impressions of the process and the answers to specific questions for each polling station on special forms, samples of which are appended to this report. Observers communicated their observations both verbally, in a meeting the day after the Election, and in written form.

The report that follows describes the Observers' findings and outlines the Mission's conclusions and recommendations. It begins with an overview of the political system of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the electoral organization and voting procedure, the main political parties and other stakeholders and the political context of the December 9, 2015 elections. Chapter III then describes the Mission's observations before, during and after the Elections. Chapter IV presents the Mission's conclusions and recommendations. Appendices contain documents relevant to the Mission's activities in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

CHAPTER II - POLITICAL SYSTEM AND ELECTORAL ORGANIZATION

A. POLITICAL SYSTEM AND STRUCTURE OF GOVERNMENT

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG) attained independence on October 27, 1979. It is a parliamentary democracy within the Commonwealth of Nations and Queen Elizabeth II is the nominal head of state represented in the country by the Governor-General, an honorary appointment made on the advice of the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister and Cabinet make up the Executive Branch, while a 15-member elected House of Representatives and a 6-member appointed Senate form a Unicameral Legislature. Following general elections, the leader of the majority party is sworn in as Prime Minister, and the Cabinet is chosen. The Leader of the party winning the next largest bloc of seats is named Leader of the Opposition. The Governor-General appoints senators, four on the advice of the Prime Minister and two on the advice of the Leader of the Opposition.

General Elections are held at intervals not longer than five years. The Prime Minister has the right to advise the Governor-General to dissolve the House of Assembly at any time in this period and thus determine the date of the general elections. On December 9, 2015, voters went to the polls to elect all 15 members of the House of Representatives, each of whom serve terms not to exceed five years. Members represent individual constituencies and are elected by a simple majority vote in a single-member, first past the post system. There are two parties represented in parliament: the Unity Labour Party (ULP) and the New Democratic Party (NDP).

The qualifications to hold office as a House of Assembly representative and as a Senator are similar. To be eligible for either chamber, one must be a Commonwealth citizen, at least twenty-one years old, and have resided in St. Vincent and the Grenadines for at least one year immediately prior to his or her nomination.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines has an independent judiciary that is part of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Supreme Court System. The OECS Appeals Court is the final arbiter on all electoral petition matters.

B. ELECTORAL SYSTEM/ORGANIZATION

All citizens of St. Vincent and the Grenadines who have reached the age of eighteen are entitled to register to vote, provided they are residents in St. Vincent and the Grenadines on the date of registration. Commonwealth citizens may also vote if they have been residents in St. Vincent and the Grenadines for at least twelve months prior to registration.

Elections in St. Vincent and the Grenadines are managed by the Supervisor of Elections, whose office falls under the purview of the Ministry of National Security, Air and Sea Port Development, but who is appointed by the Governor General. The Representation of the People Act of 1982 serves as the primary electoral law of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. However, the Supervisor of Elections executes her responsibilities mindful also of the following guiding instruments:

- Constitution of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

- Act No. 7 of 1982, amended by Act No. 2 of 1983, Act No. 8 of 1984, Act No. 20 of 1987, Act No. 25 of 1989, Act No. 10 of 1992, Act No. 1 of 1998, Act No. 4 of 2005, Act No. 7 of 2009.
- Act No. 8 of 2015
- Handbook for Election Workers

The Supervisor of Elections certifies the results of elections. On the Supervisor’s advice, the Governor-General appoints a Returning Officer in each constituency. The Returning Officer is responsible for receiving registration requests, modifying the electoral registry during the claims-and-objections period and organizing and administering the elections. The Supervisor of Elections also appoints a Presiding Officer and one or more Poll clerks for each polling station. The Presiding Officer is in charge of the overall conduct of the voting process and the Poll clerk assists the Presiding Officer on Election Day.

The country is divided into constituencies with polling divisions within each one. Each polling division consists of one or two voting centers based on the number of registered voters in the area.

i. Constituencies Map

St. Vincent and the Grenadines Electoral Map



ii. Registration of Candidates

Under the provisions of the Constitution, the electoral process commences when the Governor-General issues a writ under the public seal addressed to the Returning Officers in the constituencies where the election will be held. The Supervisor of Elections then notifies the general public of the day and place fixed for the nomination of candidates. This notice is published in the *Gazette* and aired on radio and television. Elections must be held not less than 15 and not more than 21 business days after nomination day.

A prospective candidate must be nominated in writing by at least six registered voters from the constituency for which he or she seeks election. Prospective candidates must also make a deposit of EC\$500. Any candidate who fails to obtain 15 percent of the votes cast on polling day loses his or her deposit.

On Nomination Day, November 20, 2015 the ruling Unity Labour Party (ULP) and the main opposition New Democratic Party (NDP) each presented candidates to contest all 15 seats. The Green Party had 7 and the Democratic Republican Party presented 6 candidates, for a total of 43 candidates. There were no independent candidates.

iii. The Voting Process

On Election Day voting begins at 7:00 am and ends at 5:00 pm. Present in each polling station are the Presiding Officer, one or two poll clerks, a Party Agent representing each of the Political Candidates; and a Police Officer. The detailed explanation of the voting procedures and the duties and responsibilities of the various officials conducting the polls on election-day are contained in the appendices. The following is a brief summary:

Voting Process

- Voter presents identity card or any official document with photo or confirms that his/her name is on the list and requests his/her identity be verified with identity cards that the Electoral Office has provided.
- Electoral workers verify and deliver ballots which are stamped and signed by the Presiding Officer.
- The voter proceeds to voting room, selects choice and returns with folded ballot. The Presiding Officer separates counterfoil and, in the presence of the voter, deposits ballot in ballot box.
- The Poll Clerk registers the vote in the electoral registry.

Scrutiny Process

- Scrutiny of the votes is carried out at the end of the voting in presence of party agents and observers.
- Before initiating counting, tally sheets are delivered to all persons present so that they may keep track.
- Upon conclusion of counting process and verification of all issued votes, poll workers and party agents sign the statement of poll. During the counting process votes for each candidate are separated into stacks and at the end of the process, placed into separate envelopes. Rejected and spoiled votes are also placed in separate envelopes.

The statement of poll and all other materials in accordance with the manual are delivered to the returning officer who transmits preliminary results from polling stations to Central Command.

C. POLITICAL PARTIES AND OTHER ACTORS

Two parties have dominated politics in St. Vincent and the Grenadines in the last 20 years. The Unity Labor Party (ULP), a merger of two labor focused parties, has won each of the three general elections since 2001, with 12 of the 15 seats in its first two terms, and 8 seats in its third term. The New Democratic Party (NDP) held the reins of power from 1984 to 2001, and is the only party in the country's history to have held all 15 seats in the House of Assembly – a feat it accomplished at the 1989 elections.

The December 9 General Elections were contested by four political parties: the ruling Unity Labor Party (ULP) led by Dr. Ralph E. Gonsalves, the opposition New Democratic Party (NDP) led by Mr. Arnhim Eustace, the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Green Party, led by Mr. Ivan O'Neal and the Democratic Republican Party, led by Ms. Anesia Baptiste.

i. New Democratic Party (NDP)

The New Democratic Party (NDP) was founded in 1975 by James Mitchell of the Grenadine island of Bequia. The NDP won four successive elections (1984, 1989, 1994, and 1998), winning all 15 seats in Parliament in 1989. In the general elections of 1998, the NDP won 45 percent of the popular vote, but secured a one-seat majority in Parliament. With the unexpected resignation of James Mitchell as Party Leader and Prime Minister on October 27, 2000, then Minister of Finance, Arnhim Eustace, assumed these posts. The symbol of the NDP is the key, and its official color is yellow. The NDP won 3 of 15 seats in the December 7, 2005 elections and 7 of the 15 in 2010.

ii. Unity Labour Party (ULP)

Following the union of the St. Vincent Labour Party, headed by Vincent Beache, then leader of the opposition, and the Movement for National Unity, headed by Ralph E. Gonsalves, the Unity Labour Party was founded in October 1994. Vincent Beache and Ralph Gonsalves became the leader and deputy leader of the party, respectively. In 1994, the ULP won three seats in Parliament. In 1998, the ULP increased its number of seats in Parliament to seven, one short of a governing majority, despite winning 55% of the popular vote. In November 1998, Ralph Gonsalves was elected leader of the party, and Ormiston "Ken" Boyea became deputy leader. (Boyea eventually resigned from the party to create the People's Progressive Movement, and Louis Straker took his place as deputy leader). In the March 28, 2001 elections, the ULP won 12 of the 15 seats. Since then Ralph Gonsalves has been the Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. In the December 7, 2005 general elections, the ULP won 12 of the 15 seats and in 2010 it won 8 of the 15 seats. The party symbol of the ULP is the star and its color is red.

iii. St. Vincent and the Grenadines Green Party

The SVG Green Party was co-founded in 2005 by Ivan O'Neal and Ordan Graham and is led by Ivan O'Neal. The party symbol of the Green Party is the telephone and its color is green. In the 2005 elections, the Green party had two candidates. For the 2010 elections the Party presented candidates for all 15 constituencies, although two candidates were disqualified on Nomination Day.

iv. The Democratic Republican Party (DRP)

The Democratic Republican Party (DRP) was founded in 2012, making this the first general election contested by the party. Its leader, Anesia Baptiste, had previously been a member of the ULP and the NDP. The party fielded 6 candidates. The party colour is blue and its symbol is the heart.

Table 1**CANDIDATES NOMINATED FOR GENERAL ELECTIONS 2015**

CONSTITUENCY	UNITY LABOUR PARTY	NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY	SVG GREEN PARTY	DEMOCRATIC REPUBLICAN PARTY
North Windward	Mr. Montgomery Daniel	Mr. Lauron 'Sheara' Baptiste	Mr. Christian Waldron	Mr. George Byron
North Central Windward	Dr. Ralph E. Gonsalves (Leader)	Mr. Kenroy Johnson	-	Mr. Haran Grant
South Central Windward	Mr. Saboto Caesar	Mr. Addison 'Bash' Thomas	Mr. Kenneth Horne	-
South Windward	Mr. Frederick Stephenson	Mr. Noel Dickson	Mr. Ivan O'Neal (Leader)	-
Marriaqua	Mr. St. Clair 'Jimmy' Prince	Mr. Curtis Bowman	Ms. Adella Samuel	-
East St. George	Mr. Camillo Gonsalves	Dr. Linton A. Lewis	Mr. Kadmiel McFee	Mr. Calvert Baptiste
West St. George	Mr. Cecil 'Ces' McKie	Dr. Julian 'Jules' Ferdinand	-	Ms. Anesia Baptiste (Leader)
East Kingstown	Mr. Luke Browne	Mr. Arnhim Eustace (Leader)	-	Ms. Karima Parris
Central Kingstown	Mr. Beresford Phillips	Mr. St. Clair Leacock	Ms. Marsha Caruth	-
West Kingstown	Ms. Deborah Charles	Mr. Daniel Cummings	Ms. Natasha Black	-
South Leeward	Mr. Jomo Thomas	Mr. Nigel Stevenson	-	Mr. Wendell Parris Sr.
Central Leeward	Sir Louis Straker	Mr. Benjamin Exeter	-	-
North Leeward	Mr. Carlos James	Mr. Roland 'Patel' Matthews	-	-
Northern Grenadines	Mr. Herman Belmar	Dr. Godwin Friday	-	-
Southern Grenadines	Mr. Edwin Snagg	Mr. Terrance Ollivierre	-	-

2. Social Organization

Following social and political unrest in the country in 2000, the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Christian Council was invited by CARICOM to establish the National Monitoring and Consultative Mechanism (NMCM), to ensure that free and fair elections were held. The NMCM monitored those elections, as an independent body, as well as the general elections of 2005 and

2010, and the Referendum on Constitutional Reform in 2009. At its inception in May 2000, the membership of the NMCM comprised the National Council of Women, the National Youth Council, the Chamber of Industry and Commerce, the Organization in Defence of Democracy, the New Democratic Party and the Unity Labour Party. The Peoples Progressive Party (PPP), the Green Party and the Bar Association subsequently became members. The PPP and the Organization in Defense of Democracy have since ceased functioning, but all other members remain. Since its inception, funding for the NMCM has come from the Government.

The NMCM is convened and chaired by the Christian Council. The Chair of the NMCM at the time of the elections was the President of the Christian Council.

3. International Community

In addition to the OAS Electoral Observation Mission, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) mounted an observer mission under the leadership of Mr. Gaspar Jn. Baptiste, Chief Elections Officer of the St. Lucia Electoral Department. The Commonwealth Secretariat also mounted a three-person mission, led by Paulo Cuinica, Commissioner of the Mozambique Electoral Commission.

D. POLITICAL CONTEXT

The December 9 elections were projected to be close and they were. Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves and the ULP sought a fourth term in office – traditionally a challenge in Caribbean elections, and particularly so in this instance considering the party’s narrow margin of victory in the 2010 elections (8 seats to the opposition NDP’s 7 seats). The elections represented the best opportunity that Opposition Leader Arnhim Eustace and the NDP had since 2001 to unseat the ULP, and was Mr. Eustace’s fourth try for the Prime Minister’s Office. With elections in St. Vincent and the Grenadines typically contested along party lines, success in the hinged to a great extent on how well each party was able to mobilize its supporters, though the desire for change may have also been a factor. An analysis by Caribbean pollster CADRES (Caribbean Development Research Services) undertaken just prior to the polls suggested that a two percent swing to either side was all that was needed to secure a win for either of the two main parties.

Among the issues addressed on the campaign trail were strategies for the country’s economic recovery following a series of natural disasters that compounded challenges occasioned by the global financial crisis. The country’s foreign policy, increased access to tertiary level education and completion of the Argyle international airport, were also areas which featured in the national conversation in the run-up to the polls. Indeed, this last issue was the focus of much attention in the last days of the campaign with each of the two main parties sensationalizing their respective positions in dramatic fashion.

Concerns about good governance also occupied the minds of the electorate. Citizen claims of corruption and political victimization were not uncommon, although St. Vincent and the Grenadines consistently ranks highly in terms of its corruption index (in 2015 Transparency International ranked it 29th of 173 countries), as well as civil liberties, political rights and freedoms (#1 ranking by Freedom House in 2015),

CHAPTER III - MISSION ACTIVITIES AND OBSERVATIONS

A. PRE-ELECTION

During their visit, the Chief of Mission and other members of the OAS Electoral Observation Mission (OAS/EOM) met with a wide cross-section of stakeholders and entities in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, which included the General Secretaries of the New Democratic Party and of the Unity Labour Party, the Leaders and other representatives of the two smaller parties – the SVG Green Party and the Democratic Republican Party, the Supervisor of Elections and a diverse group of civil society organizations. The EOM also met with the Commissioner of Police for St. Vincent and the Grenadines and with members of the National Monitoring and Consultative Mechanism, which fielded national observers on Election Day. The members of the Mission received training in election observation methodology and on the electoral system of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

In this pre-electoral phase, the OAS/EOM noted the significant preparations made by the Electoral Authorities in St. Vincent and the Grenadines ahead of the election to develop procedures and systems that benefited the electoral process.

i. Participation of Women and Youth

The OAS Mission welcomed the continued high level of participation by women in most areas of the political process, but noted that a mere 7 of the 43 or 16.28% of candidate nominees for elective office were women, the majority of whom were nominated by the two smaller parties. Stakeholders agreed that while there was no party or other policies which impeded women's access to electoral competition, there existed a pervasive reluctance on the part of potential female candidates to be exposed to the harsh rhetoric associated with the political campaign. Likewise, the mission observed the enthusiastic involvement of youth in the campaign, particularly on social media, and in respect of their consideration of the issues, as well as the noteworthy participation of several younger candidates in the electoral competition.

ii. Electoral Organization

The Mission heard concerns regarding various elements of the voting process, among them references to the integrity of the Voters List, specifically the higher than average number of transfers in competitive constituencies, and the concerns raised in respect of the 15-day special registration period following the announcement of the elections. The Mission noted recent efforts by the Electoral Department to purge and to update the list of voters and suggests that this be a regular exercise in order to maintain a consistently clean electoral list. Indeed, after some "debugging" the voters list was composed of 89,527 citizens. A national identity card with innovative measures containing, among other features, a voter number was among the innovative features for the elections.

Table 2
VOTER REGISTRANTS BY CONSTITUENCY AND GENDER

Constituency	Registry	Male	%	Female	%
Central Kingstown	6644	3314	49.88	3330	50.12
Central Leeward	6102	3192	52.31	2910	47.69
East Kingstown	6583	3297	50.08	3286	49.92
East ST. George	7789	3836	49.25	3953	50.75
Marriaqua	6210	3083	49.65	3127	50.35
North Central Windward	5297	2775	52.39	2522	47.61
North Leeward	5704	3011	52.79	2693	47.21
North Windward	6295	3326	52.84	2969	47.16
Northern Grenadines	3841	2000	52.07	1841	47.93
South Central Windward	5788	3031	52.37	2757	47.63
South Leeward	7340	3788	51.61	3552	48.39
South Windward	6035	3095	51.28	2940	48.72
Southern Grenadines	2691	1442	53.59	1249	46.41
West Kingstown	6328	3162	49.97	3166	50.03
West St. George	6880	3471	50.45	3409	49.55
Totals	89527	45823	51.18	43704	48.82

Source: Electoral Department, St. Vincent and the Grenadines

Reference was regularly made to the inadequacy of voter education for these elections via the usual media channels. This resulted in reliance on political parties in many cases for basic information on the voting processes. Notwithstanding, the use of technology for assisting with locating of polling stations for individual voters to exercise their franchise came in for significant commendation.

Concerns were also expressed that the post of Supervisor of Elections, while created by constitutional mandate, is a dependency of the Office of the Prime Minister. It was cited that such dependency could lead to perceptions regarding a lack of autonomy and independence. In the days leading up to the elections, the Electoral Office, as was to be expected, was the center of much activity, underscoring the critical need for the public to be reassured that the staff operate in an independent and non-partisan manner which is devoid of any perception of political interference.

iii. Campaign Finance

Several stakeholders mentioned the lack of campaign financing legislation in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, a recommendation prescribed by the 2010 OAS/EOM report, and referenced the potential impact of unregulated campaign financing on the transparency of the electoral process.

The Mission further noted a perception of limited differentiation between the state and the governing party in terms of the use of resources during the campaign. While a modicum of state financing exists in the form of a subvention to parliamentary parties and duty free access to election paraphernalia and vehicles, third (smaller) parties are excluded as these benefits are made available only to political parties with representation in the outgoing parliament. Hence, it is also viewed as discriminatory. When combined with the greater capacity of the two dominant parties to raise funds for electioneering, it is clear that the political financing system is largely defined by unfair competition.

iv. Campaign Atmosphere

The Mission commends the electorate and the authorities for the calm that prevailed throughout the pre-electoral period, notwithstanding the intensity and strong rhetoric noted during the campaign. The Mission noted and commended the political parties for signing a Code of Conduct for the December 9, 2015 General Elections that was advanced by the National Monitoring and Consultative Council under the auspices of the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Christian Council. It is suggested, however, that in the future such a code be signed at an earlier stage of the campaign by all parties to ensure a clean and peaceful campaign period.

B. ELECTION DAY

i. Observer Preparations

Prior to Election Day, the observers completed a day of training to familiarize themselves with the electoral system of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the criteria for Electoral Observation, and the constituencies that they would be monitoring. Observers were assigned to cover the polling stations in one or two of the country's fifteen constituencies. On Election Day, the Mission visited 74% percent of the 232 polling stations, including those in the Southern Grenadines, often visiting a polling site more than once to compare morning and afternoon operations.

On the morning of Election Day, each observer arrived at a selected polling station before 7 a.m. to observe the inspection and sealing of the ballot box and other opening procedures. Throughout the day, observers circulated to different polling stations in their constituencies. They then returned to the polling station where they had witnessed the opening, to observe the closing of the poll and the counting of the ballots.

On special forms (see Appendix), the observers collected information about the opening and closing of the polls and the conduct of the voting. They obtained this information directly from their observation and interviews with the election officials, police officers, and voters at the polling stations. Observers delivered their completed forms and a short report to the Chief of Mission. They also gave a verbal account of their impressions to the Mission the following day. From these statements, a consistent picture emerged of the conduct of polling across St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

ii. Election Day Observations

As in the 2010 general elections, there were 43 candidates contesting the 2015 elections in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The ruling Unity Labour Party (ULP) and the opposition New Democratic Party (NDP) each fielded 15 candidates. The St. Vincent and the Grenadines Green Party presented 7 candidates and the Democratic Republican Party 6.

The polling hours for the general elections were 7 AM to 5 PM and voting proceeded in an environment that was notably orderly and peaceful. Party agents representing the Unity Labour Party and the New Democratic Party were present at all of the polling stations, and those of the Green Party and Democratic Republican Party present only in some. Party agents stationed outside some polling stations engaged in due diligence with some voters before they proceeded to the polling station. There were, in some instances, infringements of the 100-yard line, within which campaign materials, such as posters, should not be displayed. Police officers were present at all of the polling sites observed and effectively maintained security.

In the outlying islands of the Southern Grenadines - Union Island, Canouan and Mayreau - electoral materials for the vote arrived the day before. Polls opened on time and proceeded without incident.

For the *second* time, observers- both international and national- were required to abide by time limits in terms of their presence in the polling stations. A maximum observation period of 15 minutes was allowed at any given time at a polling station. However, observers could leave for a few minutes and re-enter for another 15 minutes. The exception to this rule was the opening and closing of the polls, where, for the latter, observers had to be present an hour before. Electoral officials incorporated this new requirement for observers into their management of the polling sites.

OAS Observers, however, noted a lack of uniformity in the application of some procedures, especially those relating to assisted voting and preferences for disabled and elderly voters as well as for pregnant women. Similarly, some polling stations were located on hilly terrain which made access difficult for some voters. Observers also discerned no standardized features for voting stations to ensure both the privacy of the voter and security of the ballot box.

Except for an altercation in the vicinity of a polling station visited by the Chief of Mission, which did not affect the operations of that polling station, and which was quickly brought under control by the Police, Election Day was relatively incident free in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Like the opening, the closing of the poll was without incident. Anyone in line at 5 pm was permitted to vote and polling stations closed punctually on the hour. At the count of the poll it was evident, from the organization and speed of execution of the closing procedures, that some Presiding officers were more experienced than others.

iii. Formal and Final Count on December 10, 2015

During the requisite Final Count the day after the elections, the mission deployed three observers in the Central Leeward constituency, based on concerns expressed by political parties about irregular activities on election day and at the Preliminary Count on the evening of December 9 in that constituency. The mission had also received reports that political party supporters were massing outside the Central Leeward counting centre, contributing to an atmosphere of tension and disquiet.

OAS Observers arrived at the counting centre, the Layou Police Station, at approximately 11:00 am, at which time the Final Count had reached the third ballot box. Present for the Count were:

- a. The Returning Officer for the Central Leeward constituency, Mr. Winston Gaymes and the Election Clerk, Mr. Clyde Robinson.
- b. The two contesting candidates in that constituency: Sir Louis Straker of the Unity Labour Party (ULP) and Mr. Benjamin Exeter of the New Democratic Party (NDP).
- c. Several agents for each candidate.
- d. Members of the Royal St. Vincent and the Grenadines Police Service who were observing or assisting with the process of the Final Count, while multiple other officers (several of them armed) secured the room in which the count took place and the building itself.

The process observed took place as follows: The Returning Officer opened the ballot box (he was assisted in this regard by a uniformed police officer) and removed the envelopes containing the candidates' ballots. The Returning Officer counted the ballots for the first candidate into stacks and passed the stacks to the Election Clerk who counted them again. The Election Clerk then passed the stacks to the first NDP agent who handed them over to the second NDP agent for close review and counting. The process was then repeated for the second candidate. The number totals were compared and agreed.

The OAS observers noted the following issues during the Final Count at this particular constituency.

- a. **Incorrect application of seals:** On several ballot boxes, while tie-locks had been placed in the required locations around the perimeter of the box and through the flap covering the slot, the seal was not placed across the slot itself. In some cases the seal was placed on the flat part of the box cover, in a fashion similar to a sticker. In one case (CL-D) the seal was not on the box at all, but was wrapped around one of the locks. The NDP agents noted that in these cases they could not be certain that tampering had not taken place, and requested that the Returning Officer note their concerns.
- b. **Absence of Presiding Officer stamp and initials on some ballots:** In two ballot boxes, which were both incorrectly sealed, a number of ballots had neither the stamp nor initial of the Presiding Officer. As this applied to the ballots for both the ULP and the NDP, and as the relevant ballots had been cut in such a way (on the slant) so that a small portion of the ballot had been removed along with the counterfoil, it appeared that the Presiding Officer had simply removed the counterfoil in such a way that his/her stamp and initial remained on the counterfoil itself. The NDP agents requested permission to view the counterfoils to confirm that the stamp and initials were present. This request was refused by the Returning Officer. Repeated appeals and objections by the NDP agents were ignored by the Returning Officer.
- c. **Partiality of the Returning Officer:** The bias of the Returning Officer towards the ULP candidate and agents was clear. During the period witnessed by the OAS Observers, the RO routinely ignored attempts by the NDP agents to gain his attention, responded to their concerns or objections in a dismissive or exasperated fashion, or complained that they were wasting his time. On the other hand, concerns voiced by ULP agents were immediately addressed and in one particular instance converted by the Returning Officer into a new

instruction for the counting process. It was notable that the instruction was revoked only after a lead ULP agent agreed that it should be.

OAS Observers departed the counting center at approximately 2:40 pm, at which time two – three boxes remained to be counted. Members of the CARICOM Electoral Observation Mission, who had arrived at the counting center around 2:20 pm, remained.

Notwithstanding the concerns noted above, the OAS Observers did not discern any fraudulent or other activities at the Final Count which could have materially affected the outcome of the vote in which the ULP candidate won by 313 votes. The aforementioned issues however strongly indicate a need for further training in rules and procedures for staff at all levels of the electoral machinery in order to reduce or eliminate the variations observed in the treatment of the ballots and ballot boxes. A greater awareness of the need for professionalism and impartiality in the conduct of the electoral process, and closer screening of senior electoral officers to ensure that they comply with this indispensable requirement, will help to ensure citizens have greater faith in the electoral process and its stewards. .

C. POST-ELECTION PROCESS

Official results were declared on the evening of Thursday, December 10 (but formally posted by the Electoral Office on December 11), with the Unity Labour Party winning eight seats and the New Democratic Party seven seats. ULP political leader Dr. Ralph Gonsalves was sworn in as Prime Minister for a fourth term on the night of December 10, 2015.

Table 3
ELECTION OFFICIAL RESULTS

Constituency	Winner	Political Party
North Windward	Montgomery Daniel	Unity Labour Party
North Central Windward	Ralph Gonsalves	Unity Labour Party
South Central Windward	Saboto Caesar	Unity Labour Party
South Windward	Frederick Stephenson	Unity Labour Party
Marriaqua	St. Clair Prince	Unity Labour Party
East St George	Camillo Gonsalves	Unity Labour Party
West St George	Cecil McKie	Unity Labour Party
East Kingstown	Arnhim Eustace	New Democratic Party
Central Kingstown	St. Claire Leacock	New Democratic Party
West Kingstown	Daniel Cummings	New Democratic Party
South Leeward	Nigel Stephenson	New Democratic Party
Central Leeward	Louis Straker	Unity Labour Party
North Leeward	Roland Mathews	New Democratic Party
Northern Grenadines	Godwin Friday	New Democratic Party
Southern Grenadines	Terrance Ollivierre	New Democratic Party

Source: Electoral Department, St. Vincent and the Grenadines

CHAPTER IV - CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The OAS Electoral Observation Mission would like to recognize the professional work of the Supervisor of Elections, Mrs. Sylvia Findlay Scrubb, and of the staff of the Electoral Office, which effectively organized the General Elections in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Likewise, it applauds the efforts of the hundreds of presiding officers, poll clerks, party agents, police officers, and of course the citizens of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, who made their preferences known in a clear, and peaceful manner.

While the Election was conducted in a peaceful atmosphere, the OAS Mission would like to offer the following recommendations that could serve to enhance the electoral processes in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines:

1. *Continued Updating of the Voters List and Promotion of Voter Education*

The Mission encourages the Electoral Authorities to continue updating and cleansing the Voters List and further recommends that the voters list also include the photograph of each citizen, so that the identification process is easy and immediate. Such a move will also have a positive impact on issues of civil registration and citizenship. The special 15 day period to register (just prior to an election) overloads the work of the Electoral Department. It is therefore suggested that the admission of new registrants to the voters list be closed in advance of the elections, perhaps on the date on which the general elections are announced. This will give more certainty to the elections and will reduce the workload of the Election Department which will be able to devote more time to the organization and logistics of the Election Day and thus improve the system and results.

Likewise, the authorities should pursue a more active and focused voter education program in the months leading up to and during the electoral cycle. The media and certain other key stakeholders should be invited to participate in the voter education campaign in a meaningful way, which could help the process. Elements of such a program or campaign should include deepened electoral training for the electoral agents that are present at the polling stations on the Election Day and strengthened promotion about the knowledge and responsibilities of each one involved in the process. Consideration should also be given to the promotion of actions aimed at preferential vote for women with children and the disabled.

2. *Establishment of an Independent Elections Commission*

The Mission recommends that consideration be given to the establishment of an Independent Electoral Management Body, whose membership should be comprised of independent actors with a strong technical focus. In keeping with best practices across parts of the OECS and the wider CARICOM area, such a body ought to be endowed with a structure and a range of powers that will speak to its autonomy and independence.

3. *Campaign Finance*

Issues of equity are critical in any modern democracy. When this is not given serious consideration as a compelling reason to reform the political finance system, then there is a danger that moneyed interests (individual, private or State) will continue to have a substantial and unfair influence on the outcome of an election.

While the dominant view in the St. Vincent and the Grenadines is that the imperative for reform in the political finance system does not exist, it is patently clear that modern legislation on election spending is required. Additionally, the view (fear) that the small size of the country may provide greater opportunities for political and other victimization in the context of certain types of reforms, does not negate the need for serious campaign finance reform. The Mission therefore reiterates the recommendation of the 2010 OAS/EOM Report that political parties, electoral bodies and civil society consider the OAS' draft model legislation on political party and election financing as a frame of reference for serious introspection and reflection on strengthening the political finance system in the country.

Secondly given the antipathy for regulation of the political party and elections campaign finance system, a targeted public education program should be undertaken to sensitize the public on the value of a transparent regulated system, while simultaneously continuing work with the political parties, the office of the Supervisor of Elections, and perhaps, as suggested in the previous section, a newly established independent Elections Commission. In designing this new electoral body and in keeping with best practice across parts of the OECS and the wider CARICOM area, such a body must be endowed with a structure and a range of power that will make it fearlessly independent

Thirdly, every effort ought to be made to discourage the abuse of incumbency which does not breed equity in the system. It may also be useful to consider the extension of state subvention to parties (especially the smaller ones) which have found it difficult to mobilize support given the costly nature of electioneering paraphernalia and maintenance of a viable institution.

4. Promotion of greater gender equity in elective politics

As has been noted previously, women occupy a significant space in the electoral process. However, this is not reflected in the number of female candidates who seek elected office. The OAS Mission thus recommends that efforts be made by all political parties, civil society and government to promote the participation of women in electoral competition. Specifically, the Mission recommends that consideration be given to developing legal mechanisms that ensure women are incorporated on the ballot, promote training programs for female political leaders and strengthen civil society organizations working to promote women's civil and political rights. Similarly, the Mission recommends that political parties and government continue to encourage youth political participation at all levels of the process, providing training programs for young political leaders and opportunities to apply their leadership skills.

5. Standardized Procedures and Training for Poll Workers

Most poll workers were generally well trained and the vote proceeded smoothly. However, as noted above, further training is needed for staff at all levels of the electoral machinery to address the variations noted in the various steps of the process.. Proper observation of the rules and procedures will ensure that the will of the electorate is fully respected, thereby reducing the perception of fraud. Training and sensitization may also help to introduce a greater sense of professionalism and impartiality at higher levels.

Additionally, greater uniformity and standardization of procedures across polling sites would be desirable. The Mission observed some variation in instructing voters - some Presiding Officers explained the voting procedure in full, while others made cursory remarks. There were also some variations in the processing of voters - some Presiding Officers took a single voter

through the entire process before inviting another voter into the station, while others proceeded to instruct the next voter in line, while the previous voter was marking his/her ballot. It is also necessary to revise and simplify the counting process and electoral material organization to be delivered to the Presiding Officer.

5. Improved Voting Facilities

Some polling sites contained multiple polling stations in relatively cramped areas. The topographic and physical nature of some polling sites also presented difficulties for access by the physically challenged and the elderly. The Mission recommends greater attention to the location and layout of polling sites, for improved access by the physically challenged and elderly and ease of use by all voters.



APPENDICES



**The Prime Minister
St. Vincent and the Grenadines
West Indies**

November 13, 2015

H.E LUIS ALMAGRO LEMES
Secretary General
Organization of American States (OAS)
Washington, DC
USA

Your Excellency,

I am pleased to extend my warmest greetings to you. In less than thirty (30) days, national elections will take place in St. Vincent and the Grenadines determining the fate and direction of the country for years to come.

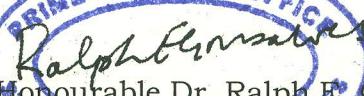
In this respect, I wish to solicit your kind assistance in taking the necessary steps to establish an OAS election observer mission for the national elections scheduled for December 9, 2015 in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

The Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines enjoys an excellent relationship with the Secretariat of the OAS and believes that an election observer mission from the OAS will provide proper monitoring and ensure a free and fair election process for all. Our nation has benefited greatly from the assessments and recommendations which observer missions from the OAS have contributed.

I sincerely hope that my request receives your favourable attention and consideration as we work together to uphold the principles of democracy.

Accept Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration and best wishes for your personal well-being.

Sincerely yours,


Honourable Dr. Ralph E. Gonsalves
Prime Minister

**Tel: 784-456-1703 <> Fax: 784-457-2152
E-mail: pmosvg@vincysurf.com**



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Panama
Paraguay
Peru
Saint Kitts and Nevis
Saint Lucia
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
Suriname
Trinidad and Tobago
United States of America
Uruguay
Venezuela

November 16, 2015

Dr. The Honourable Ralph Gonsalves
Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines
Office of the Prime Minister
Kingstown
St. Vincent and the Grenadines

Honourable Minister,

I have the pleasure to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated November 13, 2015 in which the government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines requests the Organization of American States to observe the General Elections to be held on December 9, 2015.

Through its observation and technical assistance efforts, the OAS remains committed to strengthening the electoral processes in the Americas. I am therefore pleased to respond positively to this request and honored to deploy an OAS Electoral Observation Mission (EOM) to St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

I have instructed the Department for Electoral Cooperation and Observation (DECO) of the OAS Secretariat of Political Affairs to prepare a proposal and budget that contemplates the observation of the different facets of this important exercise and maximizes coverage of the polling stations on the date of the elections. As is customary, the size and scope of this mission will ultimately depend on the voluntary contributions received from the OAS Member and Observer States.

Please accept, Honourable Prime Minister, the assurances of my highest consideration.


Luis Almagro
Secretary General

**AGREEMENT
BETWEEN
THE GOVERNMENT OF SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES
AND
THE GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES
REGARDING
THE PRIVILEGES AND IMMUNITIES OF THE OAS ELECTORAL OBSERVER
MISSION FOR THE 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS
IN SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES**

**AGREEMENT
BETWEEN
THE GOVERNMENT OF SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES
AND
THE GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES
REGARDING
THE PRIVILEGES AND IMMUNITIES OF THE OAS ELECTORAL OBSERVER
MISSION FOR THE 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS
IN SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES**

The Parties to this Agreement, the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States (hereinafter referred to as the “GS/OAS”) and the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (hereinafter referred to as the “Government”),

WHEREAS:

On November 13, 2015, the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines invited the GS/OAS to observe the General Elections, to be held on December 9, 2015 in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines;

The Secretary General of the Organization of American States, informed the Government that he accepted the invitation to establish an Electoral Observer Mission in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines for the General Elections (hereinafter referred to as the “OAS Observer Mission”), subject to obtaining the necessary resources to finance the establishment of the OAS Observer Mission;

The OAS Observer Mission will be comprised of officials of the GS/OAS and other persons contracted at GS/OAS headquarters, as well as other international observers specifically under contract with the GS/OAS for the OAS Observer Mission (hereinafter referred to as the “Members of the OAS Observer Mission” or the “Members”); and

The basic privileges and immunities enjoyed by the OAS, the GS/OAS, and its staff in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines are set out in the Charter of the Organization and in the Agreement Between the Government and the GS/OAS for the Establishment and Functioning in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines of the Office of the GS/OAS in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, signed by the Parties on September, 27, 1984,

NOW, THEREFORE THE PARTIES HAVE AGREED AS FOLLOWS:

CHAPTER I
PRIVILEGES AND IMMUNITIES OF THE OAS OBSERVER MISSION

ARTICLE I

The privileges and immunities of the OAS Observer Mission shall be those accorded to the OAS, to the GS/OAS, to its organs, and to its staff.

ARTICLE II

2.1. The property and effects of the OAS Observer Mission, located in any part of the territory of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and in possession of any person, shall enjoy immunity against any type of judicial proceeding; save in those specific cases for which said immunity is expressly waived in writing by the Secretary General of the OAS.

2.2 However, it is understood that said waiver of immunity by the Secretary General of the OAS shall not have the effect of subjecting any such property and effects to any type of measure of execution.

ARTICLE III

3.1 The premises occupied by the OAS Observer Mission shall be inviolable.

3.2 Moreover, the property and effects of the OAS Observer Mission, in any part of the territory of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and in possession of any person or entity, shall enjoy immunity against search and seizure, confiscation, expropriation and against any form of intervention, be it executive, administrative, judicial or legislative.

ARTICLE IV

The files of the OAS Observer Mission and all of the documents pertaining thereto or in the possession of any person or entity shall be inviolable wherever they are located.

ARTICLE V

5.1 The OAS Observer Mission shall be:

a) exempt from any internal taxation, it being understood, however, that they may not claim any type of tax exemption that is in fact remuneration for public services;

b) exempt from any type of customs duty, prohibition and restriction in respect of articles and publications that they may import or export for their official use. It is understood, however, that the articles they import duty-free may be sold within Saint Vincent and the Grenadines only in accordance with conditions expressly agreed upon by the Parties; and

c) exempt from ordinances, regulations or moratoria of any kind. Moreover, they may have currency of any type, carry their accounts in any foreign currency and transfer their funds in foreign currency.

ARTICLE VI

The OAS Observer Mission may establish and operate in the territory of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines an independent radio communication system to provide an on-going communications link between the Members and the vehicles used by the Members with Mission offices and regional headquarters, such as the central office in Kingstown and between the latter and the headquarters of the GS/OAS in Washington, D.C., United States of America. The Government shall provide all the technical and administrative support necessary for this to be achieved.

CHAPTER II

MEMBERS OF THE OAS OBSERVER MISSION

ARTICLE VII

The Members of the OAS Observer Mission shall be those persons who have been designated by the GS/OAS and accredited with the authorities of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

ARTICLE VIII

8.1 For the period during which the Members of the OAS Observer Mission exercise their functions and during their trips to and from Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, they shall enjoy the following privileges and immunities:

a) Immunity from personal detention or arrest as well as immunity from any type of legal proceeding in respect of their actions and statements be they oral or written, done in the performance of their functions;

b) The inviolability of all papers and documents;

c) The right to communicate with the GS/OAS via radio, telephone, email, satellite or other means, and to receive documents and correspondence through messengers or in sealed pouches, enjoying for that purpose the same privileges and immunities accorded to diplomatic mail, messages, and pouches;

d) The right to utilize for their movements throughout the national territory, any means of transportation, be it by air, by water or over land;

e) Exemption in respect of their persons and that of their spouses and children, from any type of immigration restriction and registration of aliens and any type of national service in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines;

f) The same privileges accorded to the representatives of foreign governments on official mission in respect to foreign-currency restrictions;

g) The same immunities and privileges in respect of their personal baggage as are accorded to diplomatic envoys; and

h) Such other privileges, immunities and facilities as are compatible with the foregoing, and enjoyed by diplomatic envoys, with the exception that they shall not enjoy any exemption from customs duties on imported merchandise (that is not part of their personal effects) or sales taxes or consumer taxes.

ARTICLE IX

The provisions contained in the preceding Article do not apply to nationals of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines working as local contract staff in the OAS Observer Mission, except in respect of official acts performed or statements issued in the exercise of their functions.

CHAPTER III

COOPERATION WITH THE AUTHORITIES

ARTICLE X

The OAS Observer Mission shall cooperate with the relevant authorities of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to prevent any occurrence of abuse in respect of the specified privileges and immunities. Similarly, the relevant authorities shall do whatever is possible to provide the cooperation requested of them by the OAS Observer Mission.

ARTICLE XI

Without prejudice to the immunities and privileges accorded, the Members of the OAS Observer Mission shall respect the laws and regulations existing in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

ARTICLE XII

12.1 The Parties shall take any measures necessary to procure an amicable arrangement in the proper settlement of:

- a) Any disputes that may arise in contracts or other questions of private law; and
- b) Any disputes to which the OAS Observer Mission and/or any of its Members may be parties with respect to matters in which they enjoy immunity.

CHAPTER IV

NATURE OF PRIVILEGES AND IMMUNITIES

ARTICLE XIII

13.1 The privileges and immunities are granted to the Members of the OAS Observer Mission in order to safeguard their independence in the exercise of their functions of observing

the General Elections of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and not for personal gain or to perform activities of a political nature within the territory of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

13.2 The Secretary General of the OAS may waive the privileges and immunities of any of the Members of the OAS Observer Mission in the event that he determines, in his sole discretion, that the exercise of those privileges and immunities may obstruct the course of justice and so long as the Secretary General determines that such waiver does not prejudice the interests of the OAS or of the GS/OAS.

CHAPTER V GENERAL PROVISIONS

ARTICLE XIV

14.1 The Government recognizes the "Official Travel Document" issued by the GS/OAS as a valid and sufficient document for purposes of travel by the Members of the OAS Observer Mission who possess this document.

14.2 The Government shall issue to each Member of the OAS Observer Mission a visa to enter the country and to remain therein until the end of the OAS Observer Mission.

ARTICLE XV

The Government agrees to extend the privileges and immunities of the present Agreement to Members of the OAS Observer Mission designated by the GS/OAS, who have been accredited by the authorities of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

ARTICLE XVI

This Agreement may be amended by mutual consent in writing by the duly authorized representatives of the Parties.

ARTICLE XVII

This Agreement shall enter into force on the date of its signature and shall cease to have effect once the Members of the OAS Observer Mission have completed their mission, in accordance with the terms of the request made by the Government.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the undersigned, duly authorized, do hereby sign this Agreement, in duplicate, on the date and locations indicated below.

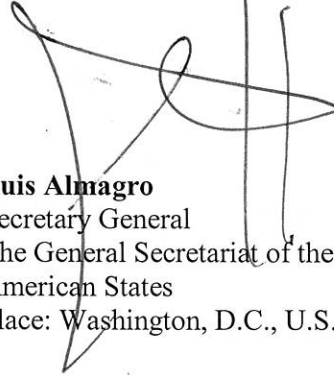
FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF
SAINT VINCENT AND
THE GRENADINES:



Omari Willimas
Interim Permanent Representative
Permanent Mission of Saint Vincent
and the Grenadines
to the Organization of American States
Place: Washington, D.C., U.S.A.

Date:11/30/2015.....

FOR THE GENERAL SECRETARIAT
OF THE ORGANIZATION OF
AMERICAN STATES:



Luis Almagro
Secretary General
The General Secretariat of the Organization of
American States
Place: Washington, D.C., U.S.A.

Date:11/30/2015.....

**AGREEMENT
BETWEEN
THE GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN
STATES
AND
THE ELECTORAL DEPARTMENT OF SAINT VINCENT AND THE
GRENADINES
ON THE ELECTORAL OBSERVATION PROCESS BY THE OAS ELECTORAL
OBSERVER MISSION OF THE 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN SAINT
VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES**

**AGREEMENT
BETWEEN
THE GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN
STATES
AND
THE ELECTORAL DEPARTMENT OF SAINT VINCENT AND THE
GRENADINES
ON THE ELECTORAL OBSERVATION PROCESS BY THE OAS
ELECTORAL OBSERVER MISSION OF THE 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN
SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES**

The Parties, the Electoral Department of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (hereinafter referred to as the “Electoral Department”) and the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States (hereinafter referred to as the “General Secretariat”);

CONSIDERING:

THAT on the NOVEMBER 13, 2015, the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (hereinafter referred to as the “Government”), through the Prime Minister, invited the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (hereinafter referred to as the “Secretary General”) to send an Electoral Observation Mission (hereinafter referred to as the “Mission”) to Saint Vincent and the Grenadines for the purpose of observing the General Elections to be held on December 9, 2015 (hereinafter referred to as the “General Elections”);

THAT in Resolution AG/RES. 991 (XIX-O/89), the General Assembly of the OAS recommended to the Secretary General that “when a member state so requests in the exercise of its sovereignty, missions should be organized and sent to said state to monitor the development, if possible at all stages, of each of its electoral processes”;

THAT Article 24 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter states in pertinent part as follows:

The electoral observation missions shall be carried out at the request of the member state concerned. To that end, the government of that state

and the Secretary General shall enter into an agreement establishing the scope and coverage of the electoral observation mission in question. The member state shall guarantee conditions of security, free access to information, and full cooperation with the electoral observation mission.

Electoral observation missions shall be carried out in accordance with the principles and norms of the OAS. The Organization shall ensure that these missions are effective and independent and shall provide them with the necessary resources for that purpose. They shall be conducted in an objective, impartial, and transparent manner and with the appropriate technical expertise; and

THAT the Secretary General responded affirmatively to the Government's request to send the Mission with the objective of observing the General Elections;

WHEREFORE, THE PARTIES AGREE AS FOLLOWS:

First: Guarantees

a) The Electoral Department guarantees the Mission access to all facilities for the adequate fulfillment of the observation of the General Elections process until its conclusion in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, in conformity with the relevant laws and standards of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and the terms of this Agreement.

b) The Electoral Department, on the day of and after the day of the General Elections, shall guarantee the Mission access to all polling stations and other locations and facilities related to the General Elections until the official count is tabulated nationally and the General Elections process is concluded.

c) The Electoral Department shall guarantee the Mission complete access to the locations in which the process of counting and tabulating votes will take place both before and during this process.

d) The Electoral Department shall guarantee the Mission access to all electoral personnel responsible for vote counting and tabulation. Similarly, the Electoral Department shall permit the Mission to conduct any evaluations deemed necessary by the Mission of the voting system and of the communications utilized to transmit electoral results. At the same time, the Electoral Department shall guarantee the Mission complete

access to the complaints process and quality controls that occur before and after the electoral process that are of interest to the Mission.

e) The Electoral Department further guarantees the Mission access to all polling stations and other bodies throughout the national territory of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. Upon request of the Mission, the Electoral Department guarantees to make available by the end of the voting process and, before the closing of the polling stations, copies of all documents printed electronically.

Second: Information

a) The Electoral Department will furnish the Mission with all information referring to the organization, direction and supervision of the electoral process. The Mission may request of the Electoral Department such additional information as is necessary for the exercise of the Mission's functions, and the Electoral Department shall promptly furnish all such information.

b) The Mission may inform the Electoral Department about any irregularities and/or interference, which the Mission might observe or of which the Mission might learn. Similarly, the Mission may request that the Electoral Department provide any information regarding the measures which the Electoral Department will take in relation to such irregularities, and the Electoral Department shall promptly furnish all such information.

c) The Electoral Department shall provide the Mission with information related to the electoral list and other electoral data referring to the same. Similarly, the Electoral Department shall provide such other information relative to the computer systems used on the day of the General Elections, and shall offer demonstrations of the systems' operation to the Mission.

Third: General Provisions

a) The Secretary General will designate a Chief of Mission, to represent the Mission and its members before the Electoral Department and before the Government.

b) The General Secretariat will communicate to the leadership of the Electoral Department the names of the persons who will comprise the Mission, who will be duly accredited.

c) The Mission will act impartially, objectively and independently in the fulfillment of its mandate.

d) The General Secretariat will send to the leadership of the Electoral Department a copy of the final report of the Electoral Observation Mission following the General Elections in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

e) The Electoral Department will make known and disseminate the contents of this Agreement among all electoral bodies and among all personnel involved in the electoral process.

Fourth: Privileges and Immunities

Nothing in this Agreement shall be construed as an express or implied waiver of the privileges and immunities of the OAS, its General Secretariat, its personnel and its assets under the Charter of the Organization; under the Agreement Between the Government and the General Secretariat for the Establishment and Functioning in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines of the Office of the General Secretariat in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, signed by the Parties on September, 27, 1984; and under the Agreement between the Government and the General Secretariat Regarding the Privileges and Immunities of the OAS Observer Mission for the 2015 General Elections in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, signed by the Parties on the [INSERT DATE OF SIGNATURE]; or under international law.

Fifth: Resolution of controversies

The Parties shall attempt to resolve through direct negotiations any disputes arising in relation to the interpretation and/or implementation of this Agreement. If the negotiations do not result in the resolution of the dispute, the matter shall be submitted to a dispute resolution procedure mutually agreed to by the duly authorized representatives of the Parties.

Sixth: Amendments

Amendments to this Agreement shall be made in writing and signed by the duly authorized representatives of the Parties and attached hereto.

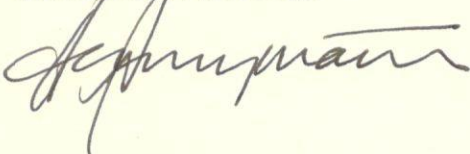
Seventh: Entry into Force and Termination

This Agreement shall enter into force on the date and upon the signature of the duly authorized representatives of the Parties. This Agreement shall remain in force until the Mission has concluded its observation mission of the General Elections.

This Agreement may be terminated by either Party with or without cause. Termination must be effected by means of no less than five days' written notice to the other Party.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF the undersigned, being duly authorized, have signed this Agreement in duplicate on the date and locations indicated below.

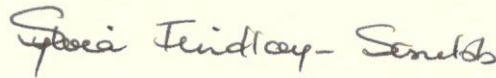
FOR THE GENERAL SECRETARIAT
OF THE ORGANIZATION OF
AMERICAN STATES:



Jacinth Henry-Martin
Chief of Mission
General Secretariat of the OAS
Kingstown, Saint Vincent and the
Grenadines

Date: Dec 4 2015

FOR THE ELECTORAL DEPARTMENT OF
SAINT VINCENT AND THE
GRENADINES:



Sylvia Findlay-Scrubb
Supervisor of Elections
Electoral Department of
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
Kingstown, Saint Vincent and the
Grenadines

Date: 04.12.15



Organization of
American States

**Electoral Observation Mission
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
General Elections - December 9, 2015**

Name	Nationality	Title	Gender
Core Group			
Jacynth Henry-Martin	St. Kitts and Nevis	Chief of Mission	F
Paul Spencer	Antigua and Barbuda	Deputy Chief of Mission	M
Julieta Maroni	Argentina	General Coordinator	F
Ian Edwards	Jamaica	Press Officer	M
Gerardo Sanchez	Mexico	Electoral Organization Specialist /Observer	M
Melene Glynn	Trinidad and Tobago	Political Analyst/Observer	F
Cynthia Barrow-Giles	Saint Lucia	Political Financing Specialist/Observer	F
Maria Fernanda Story	Ecuador	Financial Officer	F
Observers			
Susana Juniu	Argentina	Observer	F
Pamela Stroude	Barbados	Observer	F
Carlos Michael Stephen Applewhaite	Barbados	Observer	M
Riyad Insanally	Guyana	Observer	M
Robyn Janel Wapner	United States of America	Observer	F

VOTING PROCEDURES AND RESPONSIBILITIES¹
General Elections
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
December 9, 2015

a. Opening of the polls

According to the electoral law, the presiding officer, poll clerk(s) and the party agents make a declaration of secrecy prior to the opening of the polls. At the opening of the polls, the Presiding Officer opens the ballot box in the presence of party agents and others present to confirm that it is empty. Then he/she locks and seals the ballot box and keeps the key. The ballot box is placed in full view of those present in the polling station. Voters are then invited to vote.

b. Voting Procedures

Voter identification:

1. The citizen presents his/her ID card or states his/her name if not in possession of a card.
2. The poll clerk checks the voter registry to ensure that the voter's name, number and description correspond to the information on the card.
3. If the voter has no ID but is registered at that polling station, the Presiding Officer pulls the voter's registration file kept at the polling station.
4. If voter's name does not appear on registry he/she will not be allowed to vote at that polling station.
5. The poll clerk then places a mark on the voter's ID number on the registry.
6. On a separate ticket, the clerk copies the registration and indicates the gender of the voter.

During the voting:

1. The presiding officer examines the voter's finger to determine if he/she has already voted or whether the finger has been greased to prevent application of indelible ink.
2. The Presiding Officer places the official mark and his/her initials on the ballot paper, marking the voter's number on the counterfoil of the ballot.
3. The Presiding Officer provides impartial instructions on the voting procedures, detaches the ballot from a bound book and hands it to the voter.
4. The voter enters the booth.
5. The voter uses a black lead pencil only to mark an X in the space on the ballot containing the name and symbol of his/her choice of candidate.
6. The voter folds the ballot so that the initials of the Presiding Officer and the official mark are visible.
7. The voter hands the ballot to the Presiding Officer who confirms that the ballot has the initials and the official seals.
8. The voter dips his/her right index finger in the indelible ink.
9. The Presiding Officer places the ballot in the ballot box.

¹ Document prepared by the EOM Electoral Organization Specialist based on information gathered through primary sources.

c. Closing of the poll: Counting of ballots and transmission of results:

1. Polling stations close at 5:00 p.m.
2. Voters in line at this time are allowed to vote.
3. Controls are exercised by the police officer on duty at the polling station.
4. When the last voter in line has voted, the Presiding Officer closes the door of the polling station to begin the count.
5. Party Agents must be present during the count. If no Agent is present, the Presiding Officer requests the attendance of at least two voters.
6. According to the agreement between the electoral authority and the OAS, the Organization's observers are permitted to enter the polling station for this process.
7. The Presiding Officer counts the number of names on the registry of those who voted, and below the last name in the voter registry, certifies the number of people who voted at the polling station, counts the spoiled votes and places them in an envelope, indicates the number and seals it. If there are no spoiled ballots, the Presiding Officer writes the word "none" on the envelope.
8. The Presiding Officer counts the unused ballots, puts them with the stubs of the used ballots in the envelope provided seals and endorses it.
9. The Presiding Officer checks the number of ballots supplied by the returning office against the spoiled ballots, unused ballots and number of voters. This should be equal to the ballots provided. This information is included in the preliminary statement of the count.
10. Tally sheets are given to the poll clerk and party agents.
11. The Presiding Officer proceeds to count votes by emptying the contents of the ballot box on the table and unfolding the ballots.
12. The Presiding Officer verifies that the correct initials are present and calls out the name of the Candidate for whom each ballot is marked.
13. All present should be able to see the name of the candidate for whom each ballot has been marked, the initials of the presiding officer and the official mark.
14. The ballots for each candidate are placed in separate piles.

The Presiding Officer may reject a ballot if (a) it does not have the official mark, (b) it is not marked for a candidate, (c) it is marked for more than one candidate, (d) contains a mark or writing which could identify the voter (e) is marked with any symbol other than a cross or an X; or (f) is marked with pen.

Ballots for each Candidate should be placed in separate envelopes. The Presiding Officer notes on the envelope the number of ballots and the name of the Candidate. Rejected ballots are put in a different envelope and the number is recorded in the space provided. If there are no rejected ballots, the officer writes 'NONE'. All envelopes are then sealed. The Presiding Officer completes and signs three copies of the preliminary statement of poll. One copy is placed in the envelope for the returning officer, a second copy is placed in the ballot box, and the Presiding Officer retains the third copy.

1. The ballot box key is placed in another envelope.

2. Envelopes with the voter's list and ballot papers are placed in a large envelope which is then placed in the ballot box.
3. The Presiding Officer then locks and seals the ballot box.
4. The Presiding Officer, Poll clerk and Party Agents sign the seals.
5. The remaining material should be placed in a separate envelope and kept separate from the ballot boxes.

d. Delivery of voting materials to the Returning officers:

1. The Presiding Officer, Poll clerk, Party Agents, and Police Officer transport the preliminary statement of poll, the ballot box and the other materials to the Returning Officer.
2. The Returning Officer phones the Supervisor of Elections with the preliminary results.

e. Final count:

1. The day after Election Day, in the presence of Candidates or Agents, the Returning Officer does a recount of all ballots cast in each polling station.
2. Following the recount, the Returning Officer prepares the official writ to be issued by the Governor-General.
3. The Electoral process officially ends when the Returning Officer signs and returns to the Supervisor of Elections, a writ with the names of the winning candidates in each constituency.
4. The Supervisor of Elections transmits the writs to the Governor-General who administers the oath of office to the elected member of the House of Assembly.



Preliminary Statement by the OAS Electoral Observation Mission General Elections of St. Vincent and the Grenadines

Kingstown, St. Vincent, Dec. 10, 2015

The Electoral Observation Mission of the Organization of American States (EOM/OAS) deployed to the December 9, 2015 general elections in St. Vincent and the Grenadines congratulates the people of the country on the high degree of civic spirit exhibited in a peaceful and successful election day.

The OAS Observer Mission fielded 13 observers from 10 countries, and was headed by Ambassador Jacinth Henry-Martin. The team observed electoral processes in 14 of the 15 constituencies, visiting 173 of the 232 or 74% of the polling sites in the country. Observers witnessed the on time opening of all monitored polling stations, and noted the availability of requisite materials and the presence of polling officials. In the morning, there were long lines of voters who patiently waited to exercise their franchise.

The presiding officers, poll clerks, party agents and police worked harmoniously throughout the long day, helping citizens to find their polling stations and ensuring an organized and peaceful environment. Officials conducted the preliminary count, which was concluded in large measure within two hours of the closure of the polls.

The EOM/OAS notes the significant preparations made by electoral authorities in St. Vincent and the Grenadines ahead of the election to develop procedures and systems that benefited the electoral process.

This preliminary statement is based on direct observations of the OAS team and meetings held with electoral authorities, government officials, political parties, media, civil society organizations and religious bodies, among other stakeholders and interlocutors.

Gender Equity in Elective Politics

The OAS Mission welcomes the continued high level of participation by women in most areas of the political process, but noted that a mere 7 of the 43 candidates (some 16.28%) were women, the majority of whom were nominated by the two smaller parties. The EOM/OAS recommends that efforts be made by all political parties, civil society and government to promote the participation of women in electoral competition. Specifically, the Mission recommends that consideration be given to developing legal mechanisms that ensure women are incorporated on the ballot, promote training programs for women leaders and strengthen civil society organizations working to promote women's civil and political rights.

Youth Participation

The Mission commends the enthusiastic involvement of youth in the campaign, particularly on social media, and in respect of their consideration of the issues, as well as the noteworthy participation of several younger candidates in the electoral competition. In this context, it recommends that political parties and government continue to encourage youth political participation at all levels of the process, providing training programs for young political leaders and opportunities to apply their leadership skills.

Voter's List

The EOM/OAS heard complaints regarding the integrity of the voter's lists, specifically the higher than average number of transfers in competitive constituencies, and concerns raised in respect of the 15 -day special registration period following the announcement of the elections. The Mission noted recent efforts by the Electoral Department to purge and update the list of voters. It also encourages electoral authorities to implement a continuous updating and cleansing process of the Voters List and further recommends that it includes the photograph of each citizen, to ease and expedite the identification process.

Voter Information

Reference was regularly made to the inadequacy of voter education for these elections via the usual media channels. This resulted in reliance on political parties for basic information on the voting processes. The OAS/EOM recommends that the authorities pursue a more active and focused voter education program in the months leading up to the election.

The Mission highlights the use of technology for assisting with the determination of the location of polling stations for individual voters to exercise their franchise.

Campaign Finance

Since the 2010 election the OAS has recommended campaign finance regulation, which will lead to a more equitable and transparent political contest. During this electoral process, the Mission heard complaints about the use of public resources during the campaign. Smaller political parties felt discriminated against due to the fact that only political parties with representation in the Parliament could import campaign materials on a duty free basis.

Political Campaign

The Mission commends the electorate and the authorities for the calm that prevailed throughout the pre-electoral period, notwithstanding the intensity and strong rhetoric noted during the campaign. The Mission notes and commends the political parties for signing a Code of Conduct for the St. Vincent and the Grenadines General Elections that was advanced by the National Monitoring and Consultative Council. It recommends however that such a code be signed at an earlier stage of the campaign by all parties to ensure a clean and peaceful campaign period.

Electoral Management Body

Concerns were expressed that the post of Supervisor of Elections, while created by constitutional mandate, is a dependency of the Office of the Prime Minister. It was cited that such dependency could lead to perceptions regarding a lack of autonomy and independence. The Mission recommends that consideration be given to the establishment of an Independent Electoral Management Body.

Chief of Mission Henry-Martin will deliver an oral report to the OAS Permanent Council in early 2016. The report will be public and include additional observations and recommendations to those outlined here today. The OAS mission wishes to express its thanks to the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines and to the Electoral Department for the facilitation of information across the board during the mission's stay in the country. In addition, the mission thanks the governments of Argentina, South Korea, Spain and the United States for their contributions that made this electoral observation mission possible.



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OAS Electoral Observation Mission Begins Deployment in St. Vincent and the Grenadines

December 3, 2015

The Electoral Observation Mission of the Organization of American States (OAS/EOM) began its deployment today ahead of the December 9 general elections in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

The Mission is led by Ambassador Jacinth Henry-Martin, Chief of Staff to OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro, and is made up of 12 observers from 11 OAS member countries (Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Barbados, Ecuador, Guyana, Jamaica, Mexico, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago, and the United States).

This will be the fifth time an OAS team has observed elections in St Vincent and the Grenadines.

Chief of Mission Henry-Martin and her team will be meeting with electoral authorities, representatives of political parties, government officials, and members of the media and civil society organizations, amongst other stakeholders, to discuss perspectives on the electoral process.

The Mission expects to have a presence in all of St. Vincent and the Grenadines' 15 electoral districts. On election day, observers will visit polling stations across the country at every stage from the opening of the polls to the counting of votes and the publication of results.

The day after the election, the OAS/EOM will present its preliminary findings in a press conference and will subsequently present a report to the Permanent Council of the Organization in Washington, DC.

Reference: E-347/15