

CIVIL SOCIETY COALITION  
ON ELECTIONS -THE GAMBIA

*Pooling forces to sustain democracy*



ELECTION GUIDE  
FOR DOMESTIC  
OBSERVERS

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## WHAT ELECTORAL OBSERVATION IS ABOUT?

Accreditation of Observer Groups: The purpose of accreditation of Domestic and International Observation Groups is to ensure that the entire electoral process is seen to be conducted in accordance with the law and international standards, and thereby increase the level of confidence in the electoral process among the population.

Domestic and International Observation Groups which wish to be represented by individual Observers during the registration and/or electoral processes in The Gambia must apply for accreditation to the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). The IEC, on a case-by-case basis, will accredit Domestic and International Observation Groups and issue them with accreditation badges to enable them to observe the registration and/or election processes.

Observation is the purposeful gathering of information regarding the elections, and the making of informed judgments on the conduct of such a process on the basis of the information collected, by persons who are not inherently authorized to intervene in the process and whose involvement in mediation or technical assistance activities should not be such as to jeopardize their main observation responsibilities.

Observers are duly authorized representatives of Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and International Organizations or similar groups, accredited by the IEC to witness the voter registration and electoral processes. For the purpose of these Procedures, both

NGO's and International Organizations or similar groups shall be called Observer Groups.

Purpose of the Observation: According to IEC Guidelines, the objective of the observation is to **ascertain the freeness and fairness of the elections and render credibility to the eventual results of the elections** to both national and international community.

Scope of the Observation: Domestic and International Observer groups shall endeavour to look at various aspects of the election processes and come out with a fair judgment. Electoral observation scope covers:

- Observing and verifying the impartiality and legality of IEC rules and regulations;
- Ascertaining voters' awareness of the electoral process;
- Observing and verifying the voting process:
  1. Opening of the poll
  2. Voting materials –quantities, timeliness
  3. Procedures
  4. Conduciveness of polling atmosphere
  5. Casting of votes
  6. Counting of votes
  7. Transmission and declaration of results

Observation Reports: Electoral Observer Groups should be comprehensive in their review of the voter registration and electoral processes; they should be accurate and transparent in their reporting. The Observer Groups are expected to make their reports public.

An Observer has the right to:

- Observe all stages of the voter registration and electoral processes;
- Make written observations about the voter registration and electoral processes;
- Speak to the registration and electoral officials, and seek information without disrupting the processes;
- Enter and leave voter registration site and polling station at will, provided he/she possesses the official Accreditation Badge;
- Have access to relevant documents;
- Communicate freely with all political parties, candidates, and other social and political forces in the country;
- Have access to all polling stations and counting centres.

An Observer has the responsibility to:

- Display his/her official Accreditation Badge at all times while observing the voter registration and electoral processes;
- Conduct himself/herself appropriately at all times during the observation of the voter registration and electoral processes and adhere to the Code of Conduct for Domestic Observer Groups;
- Be neutral and non-partisan (i.e., avoid display of things such as uniform, or other items which is the symbol of support for or against any candidate or political party) and refrain from

- statements of support or opposition to any candidate or political party;
- Ensure that the voter registration and election observation reports are accurate, considering all relevant circumstances in the process; and
  - Comply with all lawful directions of the voter registration site supervisor and polling station chairperson.

There are two (2) types of Observers;

- Domestic Observers are citizens of The Gambia and are normally members of an NGO or similar groups functioning in The Gambia with an interest in the voter registration process and the electoral process, but not representing partisan interests.
- International Observers come from abroad: they are normally appointed by or on behalf of national governments or international groups, including academic groups and professional groups.



#### **CODE OF CONDUCT OF DOMESTIC OBSERVERS:**

All members of Civil Society Coalition on Elections –The Gambia shall abide by this Domestic Observation Code of Conduct and, while performing their activities, shall:

1. Enjoy the fundamental rights and freedom of opinion and expression, association, assembly and movement while reporting on the registration, campaign and election day, polling day procedures and the counting of the votes;

2. Comply with the election laws and the other laws of The Gambia;
3. Be professional, comprehensive, transparent and accurate in their review of the electoral process;
4. Hold themselves independent, impartial and free of any, or all, member or candidate of political party, individual, group or organization representing and promoting the special interests of any of the political parties officially registered by the IEC;
5. Be neutral and non-partisan and avoid display of things such as uniform, color or other items, which is the symbol of support for or against any candidate or political party. At no time, shall express any bias or preference in relation to national authorities, parties, candidates, ethnic or religious group, or with reference to any contentious issues in the election process;
6. Not interfere or attempt to influence the registration process, campaign and election day, polling day procedures and the counting of the votes;
7. Respect the role, status, and authority of election officials, and show a respectful and courteous attitude to polling staff and voters;
8. Perform every task on the basis of the highest standards of accuracy of information and objectivity analysis;
9. Conduct themselves, at all times, in an irreproachable manner, exercise sound judgment and observe the highest level of personal discretion;
10. Not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to any member or candidate of political party, individual, group or organization representing and promoting the special interests of any of the political parties officially registered by the IEC;

11. Have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest including to renounce themselves from observing the process if the conflict cannot be resolved;
12. Refrain from making any personal or premature comments about their observation to the media or any other interested persons, and shall limit any remarks to general information about the nature of their activity as observers;
13. Base all conclusions on well documented, factual and verifiable evidence, and fill out a statistical survey form of polling stations visited, and provide the IEC, when demanded, with copies of any written information or statements;
14. Cooperate fully with the lawful discretion of the IEC and bring to its attention irregularities and information and complaints regarding intimidation and other allegations of unlawful conduct.

 **INDIVIDUALS AUTHORIZED TO BE IN THE POLLING STATION:**

On polling day, according to the IEC Handbook for Polling Officials (Chapter 7) and besides polling staff and voters, the following individuals are authorized to be in the Polling Station and **observe the voting process:**

- IEC Commissioners and other officials from the IEC.
- Special guests of the IEC.
- No more than two observers from each observer group accredited by the IEC.

- ☞ In case of overcrowding, the Presiding Officer will regulate the presence of observers to maintain order at the Polling Station.
- ☞ The Presiding Officer must establish a schedule allowing Observers equal access to the Polling Station.
- One polling agent representing each candidate.
- One journalist from each Media organization.
- ☞ He/she can be accompanied by photographer or operator

**All persons authorized to be in the Polling Station must wear specific identification badges.**

### **WHAT TO DO / NOT TO DO AS AN OBSERVER:**

According to the IEC Handbook for Polling Officials (chapter 7), an observer has the right to:

- Be in the Polling Station at any time on polling day and observe all stages of the voting process without violating the secrecy of the vote.
- Participate in checking the ballot drum before it is sealed and record seal numbers.
- Observe ballot token issuance and voter's verification without disturbing the voting process.
- Observe the completion of Presiding Officer Notebook.
- Address the Presiding Officer about issues relating to polling procedures.

- Follow the vehicle carrying election sensitive materials for counting.
- Attend and observe the counting process at the Counting Centre.

☞ Observers must display their identification badges at all times in the Polling Station.

An observer is not allowed to:

- Interfere with or obstruct the functions of the Polling Officials.
- Observe a voter casting a ballot token in the polling compartment.
- Influence a voter's choice.
- Campaign for any candidate and/or party in any way.
- Display a logo or symbol of any election candidate and/or party.
- Communicate with voters at any time inside the Polling Station.
- Issue complaints.

☞ An observer may draw the attention of the Presiding Officer on irregularities but should not make any open statement.

The Presiding Officer has the right to instruct observers to cease any action, which is a misuse of an observer's rights.

The Presiding Officer may remove an offender from the Polling Station for ignoring such an instruction.

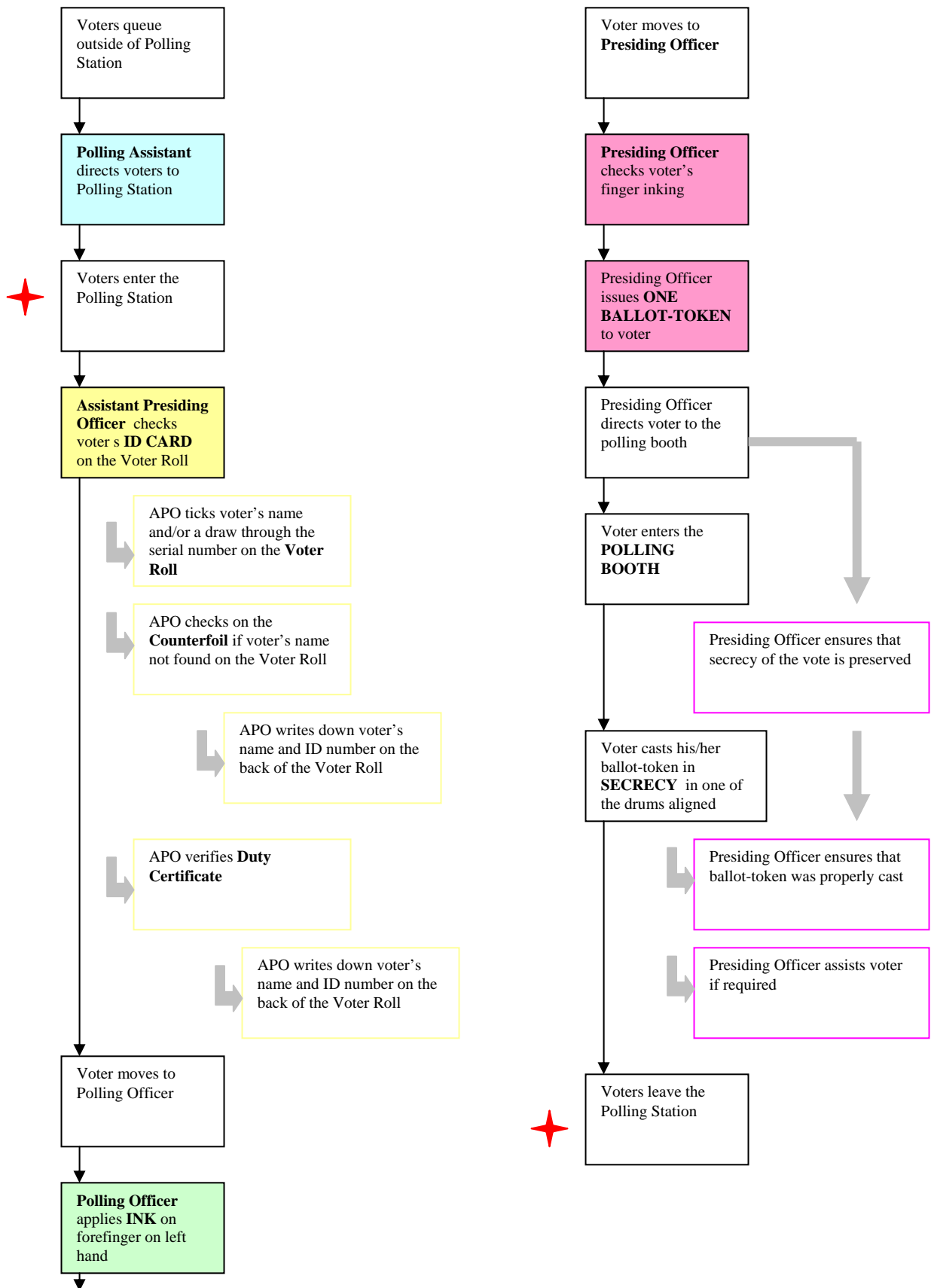
## ☑ OVERVIEW OF THE VOTING PROCESS

Voters must enter the polling station in order and be attended one by one by polling staff.

The 4-step voting process includes:

1. Voters' identification and checking against the Voter Roll
2. Voters' finger inking
3. Ballot-token delivery
4. Ballot-token deposit in drum

Once the vote exercised, voters must leave the polling station.



## PROCEDURES FOR OBSERVATION OF THE VOTING

You will observe the following on Election Day:

1. Opening of polls (starting at 6.00 a.m.)
2. Voting (starting at 7:00 a.m.)
3. Closing of the Polls (from 4:00 p.m. onward)

You will use separate **checklists** for each polling station that you observe.

### **Observing the opening of the poll:**

1. You must identify **ONE** polling station where you will observe the opening of the poll.
2. Since IEC polling station staff is expected to arrive by 6:00 a.m. to set up the polling place, you are expected to arrive at 5:55 a.m.

The **Opening (Pre-Voting) Checklist** will be used in observing the opening of the polling station. You will submit it to the Coalition Office at the end of the day together with other checklists.

### **Observing the voting**

1. Conduct the first observation on voting in the same polling station where the opening was observed.
2. Make the observation and stay for 30 minutes or longer in order to make a confident observation on the voting process.
3. Then move to the next polling station and make the observation.
4. The **Voting Checklist** will be used for this purpose. Use a new checklist for each of the polling station that you observe.

5. Always ensure that you introduce yourself properly to the Polling Station Presiding Officer and other IEC staff before conducting the observation.

Keep the Voting Checklists with you and submit them to the Coalition Office together with all other checklists at the end of the day.

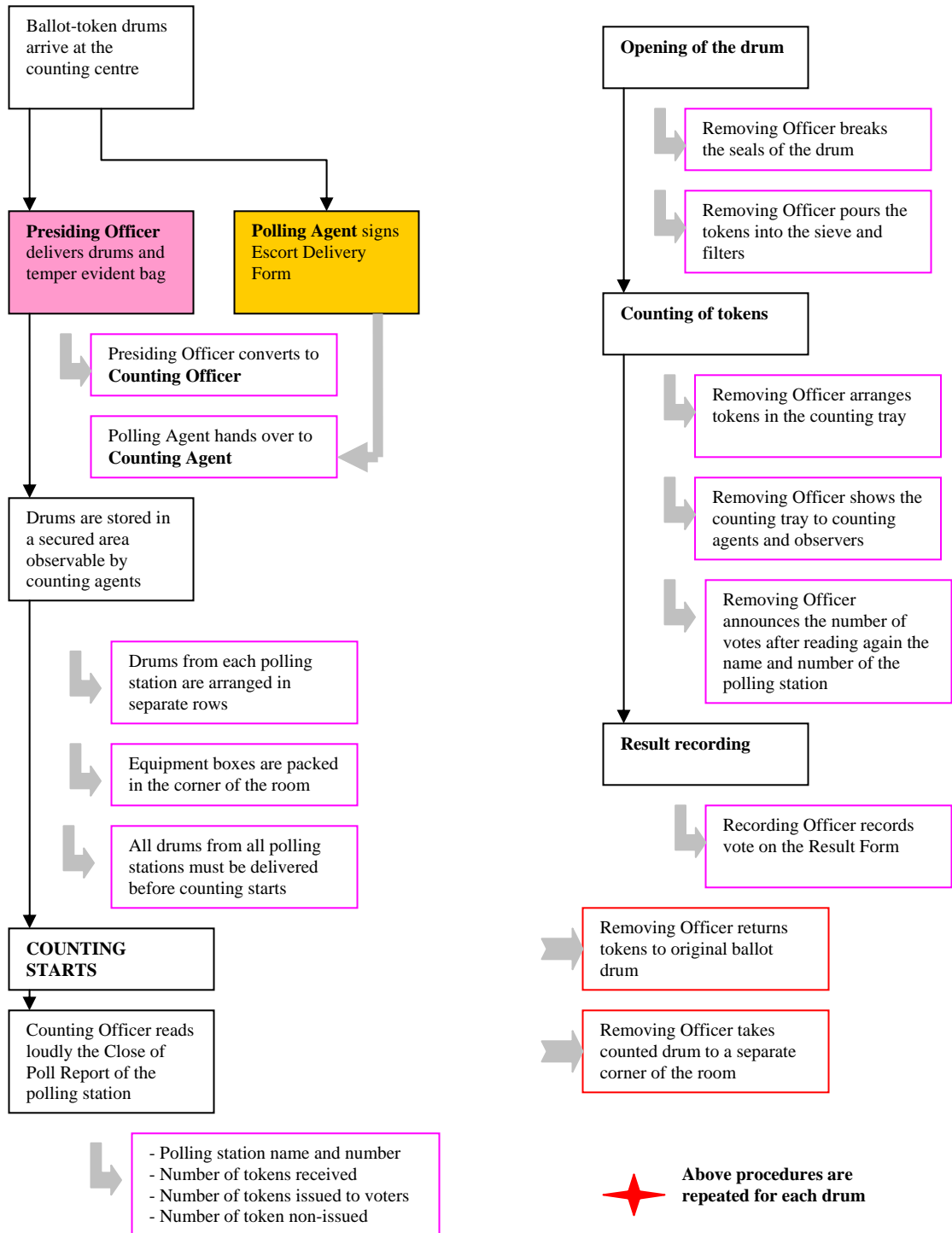
**Observing the closing of the polls**

1. Be sure to be in a polling station no later than 3:30 p.m. and make your observation on the voting in this station.
2. As soon as the polling station closes (4.00 pm) conduct the observation on the closing. Observe only **ONE** polling station for the closing.
3. The **(Poll) Closing Checklist** will be used for this purpose. But remember that the observation will include all steps until the Polling Station Presiding Officer departs from the polling station together with all the election materials to the Counting Center.
4. Depart from the polling station immediately after the collection of the ballot drums and follow the IEC vehicle back to the counting centre. You may be invited to take place in the IEC vehicle.

Bring all the observation checklists with you including the Opening Checklist and the Voting Checklists to the Coalition Office. Before leaving each polling station, make sure that all questions on the checklist are answered and the observations that you wrote at the back of each form are readable.



# OVERVIEW OF THE COUNTING PROCESS



## PROCEDURES FOR OBSERVATION OF THE COUNTING

Upon arrival at the Counting Centre, you will

1. Assess the Counting Centre arrangement
2. Observe the counting process

### **Assessing the Counting Centre arrangements:**

1. Conduct a quick review on how organized the counting centre is and assess the following:
  - a. Adequate and secured storage facility for drums
  - b. Emergency lighting
  - c. Adequate arrangement for observing the count
2. Seat at one of the places assigned to Observers and watch the successive arrival of drums. Note down any observation regarding the special circumstances and conditions in which drums arrive (open drum, broken seal...etc).
3. From time to time, return at the entrance of the building and observe the download of drums from vehicles.

### **Observing the counting:**

1. Record the time when counting starts.
2. Follow the proceedings and note down any inobservance of counting procedures.
3. Always ensure that you clearly see what is going on, especially the opening of the drums and the filling-in of the counting trays.
4. Do not forget to tabulate on a separate sheet of paper the announcement of the results, polling station by polling station

5. Verify that the Result Form is accurately filled-in after each count.
6. Note down the final results for each candidate as announced by the IEC officials, and compare with your own tabulation.

## TRANSMISSION OF RESULTS

Upon completion of the counting:

1. Verify that the final count of votes for each candidate is accurately tabulated on the Final Results Form;
2. Observe that the Final Results Form is immediately transmitted to either the Collation Centre or IEC Headquarters in a sealed envelop.

 *Your observation of the electoral exercise is now completed!*

*Thank you for your dedicated support!*

## SUBMISSION OF CHECLISTS AND REPORT

When submitting the checklists, the Coalition facilitator will conduct a short debriefing session with you regarding your experience as non-partisan election observer. Please feel free to share your experience especially on the value of your involvement in the electoral process. You may be required to attend a general debriefing session with all members of the Observation Group that will be followed by a Press Conference announcing our interim statement.

DOMESTIC OBSERVER PLEDGE OF COMMITMENT

I commit to uphold the value of the Civil Society Coalition on Elections – The Gambia: to safeguard the will of the voter, the integrity of the electoral process, and to strengthen citizens’ participation in the electoral process in order to achieve honest, orderly, peaceful, and meaningful elections, without fear or favor, in a non-partisan manner.

I further commit to remain strong and impartial in my vigilance to protect, preserve and enhance democratic institutions and practices; and to actively promote honesty in government, in service to the Country and the National Community.

These I shall do by offering myself, my talent and my time in pursuit of the above goals.

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Signature over printed name

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City / Division

# FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS IN THE GAMBIA



Civil Society Coalition  
on Elections – The Gambia  
Pooling forces to sustain Democracy

Developed with technical support from UNDP



Elections  
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