



PRESS STATEMENT
INDEPENDENT COMMITTEE ON ELECTION MONITORING-ICEM
MONITORING THE THIRD PHASE OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION

Voter Disenfranchisement and Arrests Dominate the Election Day

Thursday, December 1, 2005 11:00AM

The Independent Committee for Election Monitoring (ICEM), a coalition of sixteen NGOs led by the Ibn Khaldun Center is deploying a total of 5,000 observers to monitor the voting process for the Parliamentary Elections. ICEM is aimed at providing for the integrity and the credibility of the election process. In the third phase of the election, ICEM is deploying 1,300 observers to monitor the voting and counting procedures in 68 electoral districts where 1,774 candidates are contesting 136 seats.

PRE-ELECTION DAY ASSESSMENT

More than 600 Muslim Brotherhood supporters and 100 Nasserists are reported to have been arrested throughout Egypt in the last 48 hours. ICEM remains concerned that mass arrests of opposition activists has had severely adverse effects the credibility of government actions. Additionally, arrests create an atmosphere of fear in which voters, especially those supporting opposition parties, feel far less secure in expressing their will.

Several ICEM observers in Kafr El-Sheikh, Sohag and North Sinai were threatened prior to Election-Day and informed that they would be beaten if they continued with monitoring efforts. One ICEM observer in Kafr El-Sheikh, Salah Muharrah was detained yesterday and released three hours later.

ELECTION DAY MONITORING: THE OPENING OF THE POLLS

Observers Beaten and Denied Access to Polling Stations

The ICEM monitoring effort continues to be impeded by the authorities' arbitrary decisions and actions. Despite cases of obstruction, personal threats, and intimidation; ICEM observers are committed to seeing this mission through, fully confident of fulfilling a patriotic duty for the benefit of democracy in Egypt.

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The vast majority of the ICEM observers were denied access to polling stations to observe the opening of the polls. The authorities' illegal actions in preventing observers to monitor these opening procedures continue to seriously undermine Egypt's citizens' rights to a transparent process.

ICEM observer, Mahmud Abdel Qadr was beaten by security forces in the Dar Al-Salem district of Sohag governorate. Another ICEM observer, Sami Diab, was beaten by security forces in the first district of Kafr Sheikh. ICEM observer Ossama Abdel Azim was arrested while observing the polling station at Ibn Nabi Bakr school in Sohag.

Additionally, two ICEM observers, Karim Matwally and Mohamed Salah, were beaten by NDP supporters and subsequently had their credentials confiscated by security forces at the Sadat School polling station in the Kafr Sakr district of Sharkeya.

ICEM is appalled at the continued harassment and intimidation of its observers by security forces. These actions are in clear violation of human rights, not to mention the courts' ruling to allow independent observers the right to monitor elections.

Reported Arrests of Opposition Candidate Poll-Watchers and Supporters

In addition to arrests made prior to Election Day, ICEM observers are reporting of systematic arrests of Muslim Brotherhood poll watchers at polling stations. Such reports have been received in Al-Azb Al-Gadeeda school in the first district of Kafr Al Sheikh, where four Brotherhood poll watchers were arrested. In addition to arresting these four, security forces at the same polling station have torn the authorization credentials of the Muslim Brotherhood's female poll watchers. Twelve additional Muslim Brotherhood poll watchers were arrested in Sohag in front of the Asma Bint Nabi Bakr school and taken away in a private micro bus.

Polling Centers Late in Opening

Around two thirds of the polling facilities observed by the ICEM observers did not open on time. The late openings continue to add to tensions and a generally chaotic environment at the polling centers as crowds of voters await the opening.

Disenfranchisement of Opposition Voters

ICEM observers continue to report on significant cases of police preventing opposition voters from accessing polling centers. Not only have opposition voters been denied access to polling stations, in some cases they have been prevented from coming within 300 meters of them. Such reports have been received from the Balteen District of Kafr Sheikh, Atmida district of Daqalaya, Zarqa district of Damita, and the first district of Zagazig as well as Hassanaya in Sharkeya.

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Violence

In the first district of Kafr Shiekh, the Muslim Brotherhood candidate Hassan Abu Shaysha and a group of his supporters were beaten by NDP supporters in front of Al Madrassa Al Sina'aya Al Motaqadima school. Security forces used tear gas to disperse the crowd. An Al Jazeera camera crew attempting to cover the violence was assaulted by security forces who destroyed their camera.

In Balteen district, supporters of the Nasserist candidate Hamdin Sabahid were beaten by NDP supporters in front of the polling station of Al Bourg High School

Inaccurate Voters' Lists

Inaccurate voting lists continue to be a common occurrence in this round of the election. Numerous reports indicate that voter lists do not contain eligible voters while they do contain the names of deceased voters.

Campaigning

ICEM observers report fierce campaigning in the close vicinity of the polling centers by all party and independent candidates. Likewise, NDP, opposition, independent candidate supporters and thugs remain present at the majority of the polling facilities.

Independent Committee for Election Monitoring ICEM

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MONITORING THE THIRD PHASE OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION

Voter Disenfranchisement and Arrests Dominate the Election Day

Thursday, December 1, 2005 9:00 PM

The Independent Committee for Election Monitoring (ICEM), a coalition of sixteen NGOs led by the Ibn Khaldun Center is deploying a total of 5,000 observers to monitor the voting process for the Parliamentary Elections. ICEM is aimed at providing for the integrity and the credibility of the election process. In the third phase of the election, ICEM is deploying 1,300 observers to monitor the voting and counting procedures in 68 electoral districts where 1,774 candidates are contesting 136 seats.

ICEM preliminary findings suggest a further exacerbation of the numerous election violations already present in the first two rounds. First, there has been yet another increase in the specific targeting of the opposition as witnessed by the greater number of arrests, planned violence,, massive disenfranchisement – primarily of Muslim Brotherhood supporters and Nasserists – and biases of the security forces. Second, authorities have yet again intensified their efforts to obstruct domestic monitoring activities.

In addition, the electoral process has been marred by other serious and widespread violations that have undermined the credibility and the integrity of the election. These violations include politically motivated arrests, vote-buying and inaccurate voters' lists.

ELECTION DAY MONITORING: THE VOTING PROCESS AND THE CLOSING OF THE POLLS

Unfortunately, most of ICEM's monitors continued to be denied access to the counting centers even though many of them have official permission from the Egyptian Ministry of Justice. ICEM urges the relevant authorities to comply with the law and allow monitors to observe the counting of the ballots. ICEM believes that no election can be called free, fair and transparent if voters have been denied the right to monitor and scrutinize the process by which their vote is transformed into real political representation.

ELECTORAL VIOLATIONS AND IRREGULARITIES

ICEM Observers Beaten, Arrested and Prevented from Monitoring the Election

In this second round of elections, far more restrictions have been imposed upon ICEM observers. At the vast majority of polling stations, ICEM observers have been denied entry to observe the voting procedures. Authorities' arbitrary decisions in this matter continue to seriously undermine Egyptian citizens' rights to a fair and transparent electoral process.

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In addition to the cases mentioned in today's first report, three ICEM observers were beaten along with other observers from different coalitions as police efforts to disperse a crowd of angry disenfranchised voters degenerated into chaos and random violence. This happened in the Balteem district of Kafra Al-Sheikh.

In the Mansoura district of Daqahleya, ICEM observers were assaulted and their forms confiscated. In South Sinai, at Al-Thour School, two ICEM observers were assaulted by NDP poll-watchers and were expelled from the polling center.

Violence

ICEM continues to receive numerous reports of violence spreading, almost exclusively in districts where opposition candidates were seeking seats.

In the district of Balteem in Kafra Al-Sheikh, violence against the Nasserist candidate supporters Hamdan El-Sabahy continued all throughout the day, leaving one dead and more than thirty injured, including the son of El-Sabahy himself.

In the Herrietzayna district of Sharqiah, police used live ammunition and tear gas to break up fights between supporters of NDP and Muslim Brotherhood candidates. In the Zaqazeeq district, the supporters of the NDP candidate Khaled Zardooq beat the supporters of independent candidate Magdi Ashour.

In Atmeda district of Daqahleya, fighting has continued throughout the day between supporters of Murtada Mansour and Abd Al-Rahman Baraka. Police also had to use force on more than one occasion to break up the fights. In the Zarqa district, angry citizens, protesting the fact that they were unlawfully prevented from voting, barricaded the main thoroughfare and then set fire to that barricade which is currently preventing security forces from leaving the village.

In Ras Sidr district of South Sinai, a fight erupted between the supporters of the independent candidate Ibrahim Rafia and supporters of an NDP candidate. Police did not interfere, but rather the conflict was peacefully resolved by the heads of tribes in the area.

Numerous Arrests Made

In addition to the numerous arrests made prior to Election Day, ICEM observers reported widespread cases of arrests of opposition supporters. Whereas in previous phases of this election, only Muslim Brotherhood supporters were taken in by the police, today marked the first time that Nasserists supporters were also among those arrested. In the Baltiem district of Kafra Al-Sheikh, dozens of supporters for the Nasserist candidate Hamdan Al-Sabahy were arrested throughout the day.

ICEM monitors reported the arrests of dozens of Muslim Brotherhood poll-watchers and supporters in the Zaqazeeq and Kafr Saqr districts of Sharqiah, in the Meetghamr and Sandoub districts of Daqahleya, and various other places.

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Massive Disenfranchisement

At a large number of the polling stations in districts where opposition candidates were running massive security forces in front of the polling stations effectively cordoned off the polling station to potential voters. In other cases, security forces closed off larger areas extending beyond the immediate vicinity of the polling centers, even sometimes surrounding whole villages. In these cases, the security forces only granted free passage to NDP supporters. This happened notably in the Bilbais, Teleen and Zaqazeeq districts of Sharqiah, the Zarqa, Sandoub and Dekarnes districts of Daqahleya, and the Baltiem and the first district of Kafra Al-Sheikh.

ICEM views that this continuing and systematic interference of police forces in the election in favor of the ruling party is a flagrant violation of the principles governing a free and fair election and continues to discredit the whole process. ICEM believes that the role of the security forces should be limited to ensuring the safety of the voting process and not interfering in favor of or against any of the parties involved.

Vote-Buying

In Maragha district of Souhag, there was vote-buying in for the independent candidate Soleiman Sobhy that ranged up to one hundred and eighty pounds. In the Bandar Souhag district, the vote-buying for NDP candidate Ahmad Abu Haggy reached L.E. 500. In Kafr Saad district of Damitta, supporters of independent candidate Fathi Allah Fathi were buying votes for L.E. 100 a piece. In Sanfa district of Daqahleya, there was vote-buying for the candidate Abd Al-Fatha Al-Bahrawy for L.E. 20. In the second district of Aswan, the NDP candidate Mohamed Selim was also buying votes for L.E. 20. In the Bilbais district of Sharqiah, NDP candidate Mahmoud Khamees was distributing money and gifts publicly to voters.

Other Violations

ICEM observers report fierce campaigning in the close vicinity of the polling centers by all party and independent candidates. ICEM observers also reported that many opposition and Muslim Brotherhood candidate poll-watchers were denied access to the polling-stations. Also, in the Heheya district of Sharqiah, veiled women were not allowed to vote unless they removed their veils.

Voters' Lists

Inaccurate voting lists continue to be a common occurrence in this round of the election. Numerous reports indicate that voter lists do not contain many names eligible voters all the while including the names of deceased voters and incomplete names.

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**INDEPENDENT COMMITTEE ON ELECTION MONITORING (ICEM)
MONITORING THE THIRD PHASE OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION**

PRELIMINARY REPORT

Friday, December 2, 2005 3:00 PM

The Independent Committee for Election Monitoring (ICEM), a coalition of sixteen NGOs led by the Ibn Khaldun Center is deploying a total of 5,000 observers to monitor the voting process for the Parliamentary Elections. ICEM is aimed at providing for the integrity and the credibility of the election process. In the third phase of the election, ICEM is deploying 1,300 observers to monitor the voting and counting procedures in 68 electoral districts where 1,774 candidates are contesting 136 seats.

ICEM's findings suggest a further exacerbation of the numerous election violations already present in the first two rounds. First, there has been yet another increase in the specific targeting of the opposition including a greater number of arrests, planned violence, massive disenfranchisement – primarily of Muslim Brotherhood supporters and Nasserists – and biases of the security forces. Second, authorities yet again intensified their efforts to obstruct domestic monitoring activities.

In addition, the electoral process was marred by other serious and widespread violations that have undermined the credibility and the integrity of the election. These violations include vote-buying and inaccurate voters' lists.

CONCLUSIONS

- *Authorities Failed to Establish a Safe and Secure Environment for the Elections*

Yesterday's irregularities and misconduct were clearly pre-planned and directed towards obstructing opposition voters from freely casting their ballot. ICEM views that the continuing and systematic interference of police forces in the election on behalf of the ruling party is a flagrant violation of the principles governing a free and fair election and continues to discredit the whole process. ICEM believes that the role of the security forces should be limited to ensuring the safety of the voting process and not interfering in favor of or against any of the parties involved.

- *Authorities Fail to Establishing a Transparent Processes*

Though ICEM appreciates the new instruction from the Minister of Justice which states that the totals from each ballot box should be announced separately in order to ensure, partially, the transparency and credibility of the election results and especially, that of the counting process, most election authorities at every level have ignored the obvious instructions.

- *Obstruction of Domestic Monitoring Activities*

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In this third phase of the elections, ICEM witnessed organized attempts to thwart its activities as authorities applied more restrictions and arbitrarily prevented observers from doing their work. At the vast majority of polling stations, ICEM observers have been denied entry to observe the opening, voting and counting procedures. Authorities' malfeasance in this regard continues to seriously undermine Egyptians' rights to a fair and transparent electoral process.

Despite these cases of obstruction, personal threats, and intimidation; ICEM observers are committed to seeing their mission through, engaging in a patriotic duty for the benefit of democracy in Egypt.

PRE-ELECTION DAY ASSESSMENT

More than 600 Muslim Brotherhood supporters and 100 Nasserites are reported to have been arrested throughout Egypt prior to the election. ICEM remains concerned that mass arrests of opposition activists have had deleterious effects for the credibility of government actions. Additionally, these arrests create an atmosphere of fear in which voters, especially those supporting opposition parties, feel far less secure in their ability to express their political views.

Several ICEM observers in Kafr El-Sheikh, Sohag and North Sinai were threatened prior to Election-Day and informed that they would be beaten if they continued with monitoring efforts. One ICEM observer in Kafr El-Sheikh, Salah Muharrah was detained Wednesday night and released three hours later.

ELECTION DAY MONITORING: THE OPENING OF THE POLLS

Observers Denied Access to Polling Stations

The vast majority of the ICEM observers were denied access to polling stations to observe the opening of the polls.

Polling Centers Late in Opening

Around two thirds of the polling facilities observed by the ICEM observers did not open on time. The late openings continued to increase the levels of tension and exacerbated the generally chaotic environment at the polling centers as crowds of voters gathered outside.

ELECTION DAY MONITORING: THE VOTING PROCESS AND THE CLOSING OF THE POLLS

Unfortunately, most of ICEM's monitors continued to be denied access to the counting centers even though many of them had official permission from the Egyptian Ministry of Justice. ICEM is still urging the relevant authorities to comply with the law and allow monitors to observe the counting of the ballots.

VOTER TURNOUT

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According to initial ICEM reports, an estimated 18% of registered voters turned out to vote at the polling stations observed by ICEM. ICEM believes that the rapid escalation of violence and the organized disenfranchisement of large segments of the population are directly responsible for the relatively low voter turnout over the course of these elections.

ELECTORAL VIOLATIONS AND IRREGULARITIES

ICEM Observers Beaten, Arrested and Prevented from Monitoring the Election

The ICEM coordinator in Sohag was severely beaten and had to be hospitalized. Another ICEM observer, Mahmud Abdel Qadr was beaten by security forces in the Dar Al-Salem district of the same governorate. ICEM observer Ossama Abdel Azim was arrested while observing the polling station at Ibn Abi Bakr School, also in Sohag.

Another ICEM observer, Sami Diab, was beaten by security forces in the first district of Kafr Sheikh. Three other ICEM observers were beaten along with other observers from different coalitions as police efforts to disperse a crowd of angry disenfranchised voters degenerated into chaos and random violence. This happened in the Balteem district of Kafr Sheikh.

Additionally, two ICEM observers, Karim Matwally and Mohamed Salah, were beaten by NDP supporters and subsequently had their credentials confiscated by security forces at the Sadat School polling station in the Kafr Sakr district of Sharkeya.

In the Mansoura district of Daqahleya, ICEM observers were assaulted and their forms confiscated.

In South Sinai, at Al-Thour School, two ICEM observers were assaulted by NDP poll-watchers and were expelled from the polling center.

ICEM is appalled by the continued harassment and intimidation of its observers by security forces. These actions are in clear violation of human rights, not to mention the courts' ruling to allow independent observers the right to monitor elections.

Violence

ICEM received numerous reports of violence, almost exclusively in districts where opposition candidates were seeking seats in Kafr Sheikh, Daqahleya, and Sharqiah.

In the first district of Kafr Shiekh, the Muslim Brotherhood candidate Hassan Abu Shaysha and a group of his supporters were beaten by NDP supporters in front of Al Madrassat Al Sana'ya Al Motaqadima School. Security forces used tear gas to disperse the crowd. An Al Jazeera camera crew attempting to cover the violence was assaulted by security forces who destroyed their camera. In Balteem, violence against the Nasserist candidate supporters Hamdan El-Sabahy continued all throughout the day, leaving one dead and more than thirty injured, including the son of El-Sabahy himself.

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Numerous Arrests Made

In addition to the numerous arrests made prior to Election Day, ICEM observers reported widespread cases of arrests of opposition supporters. Whereas in previous phases of this election, only Muslim Brotherhood supporters were taken in by the police, yesterday marked the first time that Nasserist supporters were also among those arrested.

In Al-Ezba Al-Gadeeda School in the first district of Kafr Al Sheikh, four Brotherhood poll watchers were arrested. In addition to arresting these four, security forces at the same polling station destroyed the authorization credentials of the Muslim Brotherhood's female poll watchers. Twelve additional Muslim Brotherhood poll watchers were arrested in Sohag in front of the Asma Bint Abi Bakr School and taken away in a private micro bus.

In the Baltiem district of Kafra Al-Sheikh, dozens of supporters for the Nasserist candidate Hamdan Al-Sabahy were arrested throughout the day.

ICEM monitors also reported the arrests of dozens of Muslim Brotherhood poll-watchers and supporters in the Zaqazeeq and Kafr Saqr districts of Sharqiah, in the Meetghamr and Sandoub districts of Daqahleya, and various other places.

Massive Disenfranchisement

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Vote-Buying

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In Sanfa district of Daqhaleya, there was vote-buying for the candidate Abd Al-Fatha Al-Bahrawy for L.E. 20.

In the second district of Aswan, the NDP candidate Mohamed Selim was also buying votes for L.E. 20.

In the Bilbais district of Sharqiah, NDP candidate Mahmoud Khamees was distributing money and gifts publicly to voters.

Other Violations

ICEM observers report fierce campaigning in the close vicinity of the polling centers by all party and independent candidates.

ICEM observers also reported that many opposition and Muslim Brotherhood candidate poll-watchers were denied access to the polling-stations. Also, in the Heheya district of Sharqiah, veiled women were not allowed to vote unless they removed their veils.

Inaccurate voting lists continue to be a common occurrence in this round of the election. Numerous reports indicate that voter lists do not contain many names eligible voters all the while including the names of deceased voters as well as incomplete names.

Election Day Monitoring: The Counting Process

Unfortunately, the vast majority of monitors were again denied access to the counting centers, even though many of them had official permission from the Egyptian Ministry of Justice. In total, only 21 monitors out of 250 were allowed to monitor counting. Nonetheless, they witnessed serious violations during the counting of the votes.

ICEM views the authorities' arbitrary decisions to deny monitors access is illegal and also as a decision that undermines the overall transparency, integrity and the credibility of the entire electoral process.

While ICEM lauds the new instructions from the Minister of Justice stating that the totals from each ballot box should be announced separately in order to ensure, partially, the

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transparency and credibility of the election results and especially, that of the counting process, election authorities at all levels have ignored the obvious instructions, maybe because these instructions were announced at such a late time. Only in a few districts in Bahr Al-Ahmar and South Sinai did polling center's supervisors managed to apply the new instruction of the Minister of Justice.

Also, the few observers who were able to monitor the counting process again witnessed severe deficiencies in the process, reporting that the counting was conducted in an inconsistent manner within a chaotic environment where scores of ballot boxes were counted simultaneously. Furthermore, individual ballot box results were not announced to anyone present, instead they were secretly tabulated away from the supervision of any monitors, including candidate poll-watchers. The opacity of this action is antithetical to the idea of transparency in every respect. Additionally, even after the votes had been counted secretly, authorities still failed to provide any breakdown of the district results by polling station. Within the context of such observed violations of the counting process, the credibility of the election outcome has been seriously undermined.

ICEM maintains that the authorities' refusal to allow adequate numbers of NGO observers and opposition candidate poll-watchers to witness the count of the votes seriously undermined any meaningful monitoring of the voting process and demonstrates a failure to meet the acceptable criteria constituting any free and fair electoral process.

The Specifics of Counting Transgressions and Irregularities

ICEM observer Abd El-Menaem Mohammed was severely beaten by NDP thugs in order to prevent him from attending the counting procedures in the first district of Sohag.

In the first district of Aswan, ballot boxes 30, 31, 55, 56, 90, and 99 arrived at the counting center without seals. Additionally, the electricity at this counting center was cut off for ten minutes during the night.

In the Nabrawah district of Daqahleya, three ballot boxes arrived several hours late and the announced results changed multiple times.

In the Zaqazeeq district of Sharqiah, judges changed the location of the counting center and stopped the counting for two hours. Reportedly, they were afraid of a large Muslim Brotherhood demonstration outside with supporters numbering in the thousands. At first, they announced that the Muslim Brotherhood candidate had won and then, when the crowd had left, they changed the results to announce a run-off between the Muslim Brotherhood candidate and the NDP candidate.

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