

Commonwealth Electoral Network Overview and Update - Biennial Conference, 23 June 2016, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

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- It is an honour and privilege for me to address this distinguished gathering and to provide you with an update on progress, activities and challenges of the Commonwealth Electoral Network since the 2014 Biennial Conference in Nairobi, Kenya.
- The CEN remains a flagship programme and one to which the Secretariat attaches the highest importance.
- Over the past two years, despite institutional challenges that my Director referred to in his opening remarks, the CEN has continued to gain momentum and make progress as it seeks to facilitate experience sharing and to create support mechanisms, documentation, definition and promotion of Good Commonwealth electoral practice.

Steering Committee Meetings

- Three further Steering Committee Meetings have been held, at the Secretariat Headquarters on 17 April and 29 July 2015, and one yesterday here on the eve of the Conference.

Documentation, Definition and Promotion of Good Practice

- There have been calls for the CEN to engage more in the documentation, definition and promotion of good Commonwealth electoral practice.
- I am therefore pleased that Deputy-Secretary-General Dr Josephine Ojiambo was able to present to Mr Mark Ramkerrysingh, Chair of the CEN Steering Committee and Chair of the Elections and Boundaries Commission of Trinidad and Tobago the first proof of the publication before you this morning;

Election Management: A Compendium of Commonwealth Good Practice.

- Allow me to express my sincere appreciation to members of the CEN Steering Committee who responded with valuable comments to the first draft of the Compendium and the 45 Commonwealth EMBs that supplied necessary information for the Index of this publication. We intend to formally launch this Compendium in September or October this year at the Secretariat Headquarters in London.
- One more CEN Working Group met in Suva, Fiji from 2-3 December 2015 on the Impact of New Media on Elections, with participants from the EMBs of Australia, Barbados, Fiji, Nigeria, South Africa and Vanuatu.
- Tomorrow there will be discussion of the “Draft Good Practice Guide” that has been prepared out of the Report of this Working Group, detailing the good practice principles for managing engagement in this rapidly evolving area of interest to EMBs.
- Three other Draft CEN Good Practice Guides prepared based on the Reports of earlier CEN Working Groups will also be discussed over the next two days. These Guides relate to the Independence of Election Management Bodies, Managing the Power of Incumbency and Voter Registration.
- Insights shared during this Conference will be used to finalise these Good Practice Guides, which will be published in due course. It is our hope and expectation that future CEN Conferences will be able to similarly discuss and adopt further Good Practice Guides arising out of Working Group discussions on selected topics, for the wider benefit of its membership.
- I am delighted that the consultant who prepared these Draft Good Practice Guides, Mr Mark Stevens, is with us today, and will

be familiar to many of you from his previous association with the CEN and the Commonwealth Secretariat.

- Separately, the Secretariat also commissioned the production of a Manual for Commonwealth Election Observation in the past year, the draft of which some of you will have had access to ahead of recent election observation missions.

CEN/PIANZEA Pacific Electoral Networks Meeting

- In a joint initiative between the CEN and Pacific Islands, Australia and New Zealand Electoral Administrators (PIANZEA), a Pacific Electoral Networks Meeting was held in Nadi, Fiji from 9-11 May 2016.
- The theme of the meeting was “Promoting Electoral Integrity”. The meeting discussed ways strengthen and promote electoral integrity in the Pacific region, to promote electoral best practice, the independence and impartiality of EMBs, principles of electoral observation, capacity building and professionalism of EMB staff.
- Later this morning, Mr Mohammed Saneem, Supervisor of Elections. Fijian Elections Office will provide an overview of the themes and outcomes of the meeting.
- This was the first CEN event organised in partnership with a regional grouping of EMBs, and the Secretariat looks forward to hearing from the membership if there is interest from other regions to hold similar meetings.

Commonwealth Junior Election Professionals Initiative

- Reference has already been made to the successful completion of Phase I of the Commonwealth Junior Election Professionals Initiative, funded through extra-budgetary financial support from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. In the

next session, Jonathan Milligan, together with four alumni of the programme will provide an overview of the impact achieved in Phase I and plans underway for Phase II of this initiative.

- We are most appreciative to the support we received from the CEN membership in completing Phase I, including in hosting training events, provision of experts and nomination of officials.

Review of the CEN

- Six years after the founding of the Network, the Steering Committee and the Secretariat considered it an opportune time to review and reflect on the its impact, relevance and the Secretariat's contributions to achieving its goals. The Review Report was distributed last week.
- In summary, the review was intended to assess whether the CEN was employing its resources in a way that provides the most benefit to its members in alignment with the Secretariat's Strategic Plan; provide an opportunity to re-assess the goals, vision and scope of the CEN in light of the experience of the past six years.
- Crucially, the review was to propose options for a forward-looking and dynamic programme of scalable activity in line with different levels of resources available, thereby assisting in decision making with regard to setting the future direction of the CEN.
- I am delighted that the consultant who undertook this review, Ms Kate Sullivan is with us today, and will in the next session be making a presentation, to be followed by discussion.
- With regard to resources, CEN activities are generally funded through the Commonwealth Fund for technical Cooperation (CFTC). As noted earlier, CTFC resources have experienced a substantial decline, though thus far the CEN budgetary allocation and activities have been protected from wider cuts.

- Staffing remains a challenge. The substantive CEN Officer post is vacant, following the departure from the Secretariat of Ms Trish Mossman in April this year. Recruitment of a Temporary CEN Officer has been approved and is underway. However, the longer term filling of the position is awaiting the completion of the wider Secretariat review currently underway, with a longer-term recruitment freeze currently in place Secretariat-wide. I wish to thank Ms Mossman, in her absence, for her dedication and contribution to the work of the CEN. The other staff of the Electoral Support Section have continued to support the CEN as usual.
- We would welcome consideration of innovative models of secondment of staff from member EMBs to support CEN priorities and activities, including research and online networking. This element has been built into proposals for Phase II of the JEP initiative, and any additional support would be most welcome.
- Allow me to thank the outgoing Chair and the Steering Committee and the wider CEN membership for the support, advice and guidance received over the past two years. My deep appreciation goes to Mr Ahmed Issack Hassan, who has always been available for consultation on CEN matters.
- Allow me also to thank Mr Mark Ramkerrysingh and his team, and my colleagues from the Secretariat, all who have worked hard to put this week's conference together.
- In conclusion, I take this opportunity to reiterate the commitment, and ambition of the Secretariat to continue to support the CEN, whose ultimate success will depend on the will, energy, engagement, commitment and enthusiasm of us all.
- I thank you.