

ACTION ON DISABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT (ADD)

PRIMARY STATEMENT ON THE 8TH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION OBSERVATION 2001 TO BE INCORPORATED IN EMWG REPORT

ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION OF POLLING AND COUNTING PROCESS

The overall organization and administration of election and counting process was reported to have been well managed and well equipped. In the past the mismanagement of Election Day administration has been considered to be one of the major obstacles for holding meaningful election in our country. But the Election Commission has successfully overcome its loopholes this time.

It is imperative to mention that the deployment of armed forces, recovery of illegal arms and seizure of licensed arms before the election was an effective initiative of the caretaker Government and the Election Commission for holding the election peacefully. These measures reduced the possibilities of violence that was widely speculated before the election day.

OVERALL TURNOUT

The overall turnouts in our observed areas are 74.34%. This amount of turnout in any election is considered to be very high. The strong commitment for democracy and overwhelming enthusiasm among the voters has been proved by this voting turnout.

ROLE OF SECURITY PERSONNEL

The role of security personnel has been lauded and welcomed by all concerns. Voters' confidence has been raised and their participation has been increased accordingly because of strong security measures taken by the CareTaker Government. Generally voters' confidence has been raised and they felt relaxed in voting because of positive role played by the security personnel.

VIOLENCE

No major violence was reported in our observed areas. Unprecedented peace has been remained on the election day. Except an untoward incident in Kushtia and some straw incidents in other constituencies the overall law and order situation was under control. In Mirpur, Kushtia our observer reported that voting process was paused for more than an hour because of chase and counter chase by the supporters of rival political parties. However, the situation was brought under control immediately by security personnel.

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

The participation of women voters in our observed areas was satisfactorily higher than normal. About 64.95% women voters have cast their votes in our observed areas. Although the participation of women voters was very high, they faced hardship to cast the vote for the poor arrangement of the polling centers, as they had to stay for hours in the long queues.

MINORITY VOTERS

There was lot of doubts and speculations prevailed in some of our observed areas that minority voters would not be able to cast their votes. Both the major political parties have tried to take benefit out of minority issue. But finally we witnessed no major incidents of barring minority voters to vote. But in Magura our observers found some cases of threatening minority voters before the election. The role of different political parties in this regard is very regretful. This issue has unearthed a dismal picture of our political parties' exercise for future democratic dispensation.

DISABLED VOTERS

Disabled voters were given priorities in the voting queue. The visually and hearing impaired voter were allowed to exercise their right to franchise with the help of their chosen assistants. The Election Commission was obviously most considerate to the special need of disabled people and ensured their participation in relative ease.

The participation of disabled voters in this election increased than the past election because of public awareness programme on disabled peoples voting rights undertaken by ADD and Ministry of Social Welfare and Election Commission. The media deserve the pride of such a commendable work.

POLLING AGENTS

The quality of the Polling Agents in our observed areas is not up to the mark. They need to be trained. In most cases polling agents were found partially ignorant about the Election Laws. In Badda, Dhaka one Polling Agent could not satisfy our observer when he was asked about tendered and challenged votes. Our observers reported scores of similar cases.

OBSERVERS

Selection of observers from the section of disabled people was so hard job. Our task has become more difficult because of lack of cooperation by the Officers and Staff of Returning Offices in different districts. We could provide more training to our observers if we would get enough time. Late in issuing of accreditation card posed a great problem to us.

DISABLED OBSERVERS

Even though it is a common phenomenon that people with disability are teased by their fellow citizens of the society, the disabled observers reported that this attitude did not prevail in the voting centers. At least 82% felt welcome and appreciated by officers on duties and other voters and encouraged by their families and communities.

Action on Disability and Development (ADD) in Election Observation

Action on Disability and Development (ADD) is a right based development international organization supporting civil society organization of disabled people to campaign for equal rights and to ensure social justice. ADD views disability as a human rights or social issue related to attitude and access to equal opportunities and resists definitions, which relates to impairment of an individual, i.e, the social model of disability and opposed to the medical model. ADD works in 13 countries in Asia and Africa. In Bangladesh ADD implements development program with disabled people in 10 districts to promote a sustainable movement. ADD organizes disabled people in the grass root level, support disabled people organization and encourage mainstream NGOs to work with disabled people. ADD played important role in Bangladesh to strengthen disability movement in Bangladesh. To pass the Disability Law in the Parliament and establish their social and political rights. In the 8th Parliamentary Election ADD deployed 360 disabled people as election observers. Election observation by the people with disability is the first event in Bangladesh and only second in the world history. Disabled people observed the election and reported as free and fair. As election observers disabled people have gained tremendous appreciation from all concerns including the Election Commission, Media and domestic and international observers.

Overall participation of the disabled people as observer itself brought the focus on the disability issue in the 8th Parliamentary Election. Disabled peoples' involvement in the election process has been most rewarding in more than one sense. This afforded the disable people a sense of self-confidence and valuable experience in mainstream national activity.