



# CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY SECRETARIAT (CARICOM)

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## REPORT OF THE CARICOM ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION

**GENERAL ELECTIONS OF THE REPUBLIC OF  
SURINAME  
25 MAY 2025**

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**Prepared by:**

**Mrs. Dora James  
Supervisor of Elections  
St. Vincent and the Grenadines  
22 July 2025**



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## I. INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Suriname is located in northern South America, between French Guiana to the east and Guyana to the west and bordered by Brazil to the south. The Atlantic Ocean forms the northern border and the coast of the country. Suriname is the smallest sovereign state in terms of area in South America and the only independent country outside Europe with Dutch as an official language.

**Flag of the Republic of Suriname**



## Country Profile

<b>Type of Government</b>	Presidential Republic
<b>Head of State:</b>	President Chandrikapersad "Chan" Santokhi (since 16 July 2020)
<b>Assembly</b>	Unicameral National Assembly
<b>Head of Government</b>	President Chandrikapersad "Chan" Santokhi (since 16 July 2020)
<b>National Day</b>	25 November, Independence Day (since 1975)
<b>Capital</b>	Paramaribo
<b>Population</b>	646,758 (CIA World Factbook, 2024 est.)
<b>Major Ethnicities</b>	Hindustani (also known locally as "East Indians") 27.4%, Maroon (descendants of escaped slaves) 21.7%, Creole (mixed White and Black) 15.7%, Javanese 13.7%, mixed 13.4%, other 7.6%, unspecified 0.6% (CIA World Factbook, 2012 est.)
<b>Major Religions</b>	Protestant 23.6% (includes Evangelical 11.2%, Moravian 11.2%, Reformed 0.7%, Lutheran 0.5%), Hindu 22.3%, Roman Catholic 21.6%, Muslim 13.8%, other Christian 3.2%, Winti 1.8%, Jehovah's Witness 1.2%, other 1.7%, none 7.5%, unspecified 3.2% (CIA World Factbook, 2012 est.)
<b>Major Languages</b>	Dutch (official), English (widely spoken), Sranang Tongo (Surinamese, sometimes called Taki-Taki, is the native language of Creoles and much of the younger population), Caribbean Hindustani (a dialect of Hindi), Javanese
<b>Major Exports</b>	<b>US \$2.34 billion (total)</b> Gold (\$1.87B), Refined Petroleum (\$109M), Rough Wood (\$67M), Non-fillet Frozen Fish (\$49.9M), and Rolled Tobacco (\$41.1M) (Data OEC 2023)
<b>Major Export Partners</b>	Switzerland (\$1.18B), United Arab Emirates (\$667M), Guyana (\$118M), United States (\$87.8M), and France (\$72.7M) (Data OEC 2023)
<b>Major Imports</b>	<b>US\$1.7B (total)</b> Refined Petroleum (\$160M), Special Purpose Ships (\$147M), Excavation Machinery (\$76.1M), Delivery Trucks (\$64.9M), and Rolled Tobacco (\$63.5M) (Data OEC 2023)
<b>Major Import Partners</b>	United States (\$454M), China (\$250M), Netherlands (\$237M), Trinidad and Tobago (\$180M), and Guyana (\$170M) (Data OEC 2023)
<b>Income Category</b>	Upper-middle income (World Bank)
<b>GDP per capita</b>	US\$7,195.10 (World Bank, 2023)
<b>GDP (real growth rate)</b>	3.2% est. (IMF, 2025)
<b>Inflation Rate (avg. prices)</b>	8.7% est. (IMF, 2025)
<b>Unemployment Rate</b>	4.4% (World Bank, 2024)
<b>Human Development Index</b>	0.722 (UNDP, 2025) Rank: 114/193
<b>Currency</b>	Surinamese Dollar (SRD)
<b>Exchange Rate</b>	36.26 SRD to 1 USD (floating exchange rate)

## History

Before Europeans arrived in Suriname, it was inhabited by the Carib and Arawak peoples. The Spaniards first attempted occupation in 1593, searching for the legendary city of El Dorado. The Dutch also made unsuccessful settlement attempts. A permanent colony emerged in 1650, when English colonists established a settlement near the Suriname River. By 1667, when the Dutch conquered this British colony, it boasted 175 farms and around 4,000 settlers and included many enslaved Africans.

The enslaved population endured harsh and degrading living conditions. Many resisted, often fleeing to the hinterland where they formed Maroon villages. The abolition of slavery on 1 July 1863 was followed by the importation of contract workers from India, China, and Java (Indonesia) to fulfil continued labour needs for crops such as coffee, sugar, cocoa, and tobacco, which would be sold in the Dutch market and traded internationally.

Suriname achieved significant self-government after World War II, becoming an autonomous part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1954 and gaining independence on 25 November 1975. Johan Ferrier, the former governor, served as the first President and Henk Arron of the Suriname National Party (NPS), as the first Prime Minister. Most of Suriname's political parties took shape during the autonomy period and were overwhelmingly based on ethnicity. The Suriname National Party, for example, found its support among the Creoles; the Progressive Reform Party members came from the Hindustani population; and the Indonesian Peasant's Party was Javanese. The ethnic dimensions remain a feature of Surinamese politics.

The 1980 *coup d'état*, followed by the military government of President Desiré Bouterse, as well as Maroon guerilla warfare in the 1980s, have largely influenced Suriname's more recent political history, including relations with the United States and the Netherlands.

## Brief Political Background

Suriname is a Representative Democratic Republic with a parliamentary structure and a pluriform multi-party system. The President serves as both head of state and head of government. The President is not elected by direct popular vote; instead, the 51-member unicameral National Assembly (De Nationale Assemblée) elects the President to a five-year term by a two-thirds majority. If the Assembly fails to reach a two-thirds vote after two rounds, the election moves to a larger body called the United People's Assembly (an 885-member body comprising the National Assembly plus regional and local representatives), where a simple majority suffices. Each member of the National Assembly is elected for a five-year term. Members are chosen by proportional representation. Suriname's multi-party landscape and proportional representation system typically necessitate coalition governments.

President Chandrikapersad “Chan” Santokhi of the Progressive Reform Party (Vooruitstrevende Hervormings Partij or VHP) was elected by the National Assembly in July 2020 following the general elections in 2020. Santokhi, as the sole nominee for president, was elected by acclamation. His election marked a change in power after a decade of rule by his predecessor, Desiré Bouterse.

### **Recent General Elections**

The general elections in 2020 saw a turnout of 74.04% (283,834 votes cast) of 383,333 registered voters and were contested by 17 political parties. The VHP gained a majority of votes, winning 20 seats and 39.45% of the popular vote. This was the Party’s best performance in decades. The National Democratic Party (NDP) became the main opposition party, winning 16 seats and 23.97% of the popular vote. Led by late former President Desiré Bouterse, the NDP ruled from 2010 to 2020. Six parties won representation in 2020.

The governing coalition initially comprised four parties (the VHP (20 seats), General Liberation and Development Party (ABOP) (8), Suriname National Party (NPS) (3), and Glorious Empire (PL) (2)), forming a comfortable majority of 33 seats. The opposition benches were occupied by NDP (16 seats) and the Brotherhood and Unity in Politics (BEP) (2 seats). In early 2023, PL, having already lost one Assembly member to ABOP, withdrew from the ruling coalition citing policy disagreements.

## II. THE CARICOM ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION (CEOM)

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Business and International Cooperation of the Republic of Suriname, by way of Note Verbale dated 22 March 2024, invited the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) to field a CARICOM Election Observation Mission to the General Elections to be held on **25 May 2025**.

In response to the invitation, the CARICOM Secretariat deployed an eight-member team comprising election practitioners from across CARICOM Member States. Three (3) officials from the CARICOM Secretariat provided technical, logistical, and administrative support. The Core Group, comprising the Chief of Mission and Secretariat support staff, arrived in Suriname on 19 May 2025, while the remaining members of the Mission arrived between 21 and 22 May 2025. The CEOM departed Suriname on 27 May 2025.



*Members of the CARICOM Election Observation Mission to Suriname*

The Members of the Observation Mission were as follows:

1. Ms. Dora James - **St. Vincent and the Grenadines (Chief of Mission);**
2. Mr. Alrick Daniel - **Antigua and Barbuda;**

3. Mr. Howard Thompson - **The Bahamas**;
4. Ms. Debra Hughes - **Barbados**;
5. Mr. Clement Rohee - **Guyana**;
6. Ms. Brendalyn Henry - **Jamaica**;
7. Mr. Herman St. Helen - **Saint Lucia**; and
8. Ms. Lena Champa Sahadeo - **Trinidad and Tobago**.

The following CARICOM staff provided administrative and technical support for the Mission:

1. Ms. Shae-Alicia Lewis, Programme Manager, Community Relations;
2. Mr. David Allens, Project Officer, Foreign and Community Relations; and
3. Ms. Denise Morgan, Stenographer II, Foreign and Community Relations.

### Scope of Services for the CARICOM Election Observation Mission

The scope of the CEOM was to observe the general elections in the Republic of Suriname during the pre-election, election day and post-election periods. The specific duties are outlined below.

#### **On the day of the elections, Observers:**

- (a) **Observe** the electoral process, including the preparations for the start of the poll, the casting of votes, the closure of the polling stations, the counting of the ballots and the preparation of the Statement of Poll;
- (b) **Collect** information on the results at the voting tables to assist in the quantitative verification of the results; and
- (c) **Collect** qualitative observations regarding the voting process, comportment of the electoral officials and political actors, and on the overall electoral environment.

#### **In the post-electoral period, Observers:**

- (a) **Observe** and assess the outcome of the elections and the initial immediate impact on the social and political environment; and
- (b) **Collaborate** in the preparation of the Report of the Observer Mission to be prepared by the Chief of Mission, through the submission of observation sheets, oral reports on their observations and findings on the day of the elections.

Specifically, during the pre-election phase, the CEOM observation focused on the polling station preparedness and the level of accessibility to all electorates including those with disabilities. The observance at the opening of the poll focused on the timely opening, adequate staffing including security, verification of ballots, and other election supplies and checking of ballot boxes. The team

also observed the entire ability of the staff to conduct their duties and how they responded to the electorate as they engaged with them. At the closing of the polls, the team examined the time of closure, who were present to witness the counting, specifically party agents, and how the electoral staff proceeded throughout the reconciliation process and the counting of the ballots. While the CEOM was methodical in its observation, in keeping with its mandate, it observed the overall operations of the poll to see if it was done in keeping with the election regulations of the country.

### III. PRE-ELECTION OBSERVATIONS

#### Consultations with Stakeholders

Further to the scope of services, the CEOM interviewed stakeholders to understand the political environment, hear their various concerns, and examine the readiness of the electoral body in charge of the elections.

The CEOM held a series of interviews over the period 19-23 May.

Interviews were held with the following government entities:

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Business and International Cooperation;
- Ministry of Home Affairs;
- Independent Electoral Council (OKB);
- Directorate of National Security; and
- National Assembly.

Consultations were also held with the following political parties:

- Alternative 2020 (A20);
- Brotherhood and Unity in Politics (BEP);
- Democratic Alternative '91 (DA'91);
- General Liberation and Development Party (ABOP);
- People's Party (for a) Liveable Suriname (VLS);
- The National Democratic Party (NDP); and
- The New Lion (DNL).

The Suriname National Party (NPS), Glorious Empire (PL), Progressive Reform Party (VHP), and Option for Suriname (OPTSU) were also invited to present matters of concern to the Observation Mission but did not respond. The Party for Communication (PVC) confirmed an engagement but was unable to attend.

The CEOM Core Group also met with representatives of civic organisations, namely:

- Association of Indigenous Village Chiefs (VIDS);
- Anti-Fraud Platform
- Inter-Religious Council;
- National Youth Council;
- Maroon Tribes of Suriname (KAMPOS); and
- Stitching Wang Okasi.

Additionally, the Mission engaged regional and local government officials in the District Commissariats of Brokopondo, Wanica (North-West), Saramacca (informally), and Para. While in Para, the team observed the distribution of convocation cards. They also visited the Indigenous villages of Matta and Bernarddorp with the support of the VIDS Village Chiefs.

As the team planned and strategized for the execution of the mission, they also held counterpart meetings with the OAS Electoral Observation Mission and the US Embassy in Suriname.

The CEOM also participated in a stakeholders' briefing session organized by OKB, where participants received pertinent information on the electoral process. Additionally, observers were presented with their identification cards.

## Main Issues Raised by Stakeholders

Following the comprehensive assessments, which were conducted over the week, the 11-member CEOM identified the key issues raised (see below). These issues were noted for consideration to assist the Mission's independent, impartial, and honest assessment of the preparations for and conduct of General Elections.

- ❖ ***Claims of potential voter fraud:*** The claim of fraudulent activities was linked to the voters list, the printing of voters' invitation cards, non-nationals registration, the placement of party agents on election day and the security of the plastic ballot boxes. The stakeholders expressed that the vast increase of the voters list between 2023 and 2024 was cause for concern. In addition, there were concerns that this increase was due largely to the registration of non-nationals who had not acquired the status to be eligible for registration. Stakeholders also claimed that during the time of face-to-face distribution of cards, many registrants could not be found at the addresses they had listed, and also that the Ministry of Home Affairs had printed an excess of invitations that may possibly reach the hands of non-nationals.

In relation to party agents, it was indicated that they were to observe the elections from the outside of the polling station and that that would put them in a disadvantageous position, especially when the votes were being counted.

- ❖ ***Public education / voter education programme:*** The stakeholders interviewed welcomed the voter education. Nonetheless, some felt that it did not fully meet the needs of all electors, mainly the residents in the hinterland. It was argued that the traditional methodology for disseminating the information, i.e., radio and television broadcasts and also social media were not always in keeping with the communication practices of the hinterland populace, who often preferred face-to-face engagement. Many of them have no radio, television, or phones. Electricity is also non-existent in some communities. It

was also stated that these presentations were done in eight languages; however, the common languages used by some hinterland communities, especially the older members, were omitted. It was also claimed that the leaders of some Indigenous communities were not informed of any voter education procedures. The level of education among some members in these community were also seen as a barrier to receiving the information disseminated.

- ❖ ***Training of polling day staff:*** Several stakeholders expressed concern about the withdrawal of five hundred (500) polling staff mere days before polling day. They also expressed that they were not confident with the replacement for these workers since they believed that they were not adequately trained to do the job.
- ❖ ***Polling Stations in Indigenous communities:*** The lack of suitable buildings, mainly schools, to be used as polling stations in the hinterland was of concern to stakeholders. This inadequacy, they believed, would contribute to low voter turnout. Voters sometimes have to traverse long distances by land and sea if they wanted to participate in the voting process, sometimes bearing the financial cost. In other cases, political parties and even the Commissioner's Office were known to provide some transportation to polling stations for those in remote communities.
- ❖ ***Collective rights of Indigenous communities:*** The Indigenous representatives expressed that they did not enjoy the same rights as their counterparts living in urban communities, especially as it relates to land tenure, health and education.
- ❖ ***Security of new ballot boxes:*** Some interviewees expressed concerns about the security of the new ballot boxes. The ballot boxes had been changed from the iron milk cans to plastic boxes, which they believed was a security risk. They also expressed preference for the use of locks, instead of the cable ties which they also believed could be easily replaced without detection. Further, the issue of a recent burglary at the Central Records Office, where some election day materials were stored, was also of concern. The Ministry of Home Affairs, in their response to these security concerns indicated that the plastic boxes provided greater transparency and were also in keeping with international election standards. The Ministry also dispelled the notion of fraud, noting that these ties had specific numbers and that the checks and balances that were enshrined in the Surinamese Constitution and election regulations would prevent any such fraudulent activity. However, during the CEOM's observation on polling day, it found the ballot boxes to be adequately secured with cable ties and that these ties were numbered.

- ❖ **Campaign finance reform:** The issue of financial reform was raised mainly by the smaller parties. They were of the view that legislation on party/campaign financing would bring greater transparency to how parties sourced and expended funds and also create a more level playing field for all. Although one of the larger parties found this suggestion to be valuable, they also confirmed that there was no national push to have this issue legislated. It was also highlighted that the incumbent party had access to the state apparatus and that these resources purportedly gave them an unfair advantage over other parties. The stakeholders believed that legislation could help to address this issue.
- ❖ **Increased deposit amount for party participation:** There were mixed views on this issue. While the smaller parties felt that the increase in the registration fee was too exorbitant, others felt that there was need for such an increase. It was further noted that if the party was able to receive 1% of the votes cast, this deposit would be refunded. It was also the view of others that the increased fee was necessary because of the increase in costs nationally and that this would help to eliminate parties that lacked genuine intent to contest the elections.
- ❖ **President's proposed media engagement:** The president announced a planned media presentation for Saturday, 24 May, which was scheduled within the 48-hour campaigning prohibition period just prior to the elections. Several stakeholders disapproved of this media presentation since they believe that it was designed to give the president's party, the VHP, an unfair advantage over the other parties contesting the elections. It was also viewed as an overreach by the president and a breach of the law.
- ❖ **Nomination of political candidates in district elections:** Several parties complained that some candidates that were listed on the slate of candidates submitted by their party for the district elections were not registered despite their best efforts to meet the registration requirements. According to parties, the online registration platform that was used to do the digital registration was faulty, and as a result was responsible for the problem. However, the Main Polling Station disputed this claim, stating that the parties were accustomed to either registering in writing or digitally and that this year it was compulsory to register both ways. Following unsuccessful appeals to the president by these parties, the matter was taken to both the lower and appeal courts.
- ❖ **Youth empowerment programmes:** The youth representatives applauded the formation of the Youth Council. However, they urged greater attention to the Council and the needs of the youths even outside of the election period, noting that the Council could make a greater impact on the development of the youth population and, by extension, the country with the necessary administrative and financial support from the government. They were happy to note that the youth population was quite large and could be very influential in any election.

- ❖ **Voting process for persons with disabilities:** The issue of the Wang Okasi case was also discussed. This case was about the government’s decision to mandate polling staff to act as companions for incapacitated voters and cast the votes on their behalf instead of the previous system, which allowed a confidante chosen by the affected elector to conduct the voting. The decision was challenged in the courts by the Wang Okasi organization. The courts ruled in favour of Wang Okasi.

On 23 May 2025, the CEOM met with President H.E. Chandrikapersad Santokhi. The Minister of Home Affairs, H.E. Delano Landvreugd was also in attendance. The Team took the opportunity to address the concerns expressed by stakeholders about the President’s planned address to the nation for 24 May 2025. The President confirmed that he had cancelled his address. Other issues, as identified above, were also raised and responses provided by both the President and the Minister.

## IV. THE ELECTORAL FRAMEWORK

### Legal and Institutional Framework

The electoral process of the Republic of Suriname is organized and supervised by the Ministry of Home Affairs. In addition, there is a 10-member Independent Electoral Council (OKB) that oversees the process. Members are appointed for a six-year term by the president. The OKB's mandate is to supervise the general elections and declare the results of the elections legally binding for the country. The OKB also has oversight of the control of the register of voters. Additionally, it has the authority to collaborate with the Minister of Home Affairs to ensure an up-to-date voters' register and ensure that voters receive their convocation cards at least three (3) days before the elections.

The Republic of Suriname holds two elections on election day: one for the National Assembly, which elects the members of the Unicameral Legislature comprising 51 seats and the other referred to as the district elections, which elects members for the 62 resort seats (local council). Its electoral system is based on proportional representation. While the National Assembly representatives are selected by a nationwide vote, the resorts representatives are selected by the voters in their local resort. The district council representatives are then selected based on the results of the resort council elections.

In October 2023, Suriname's parliament approved a new electoral law establishing a nationwide constituency for the 2025 elections. This law replaced the district-based model, which encompassed ten (10) districts, with one constituency to coincide with the national boundaries. The aim of the new electoral system for electing members to the National Assembly is to bring focus on advancing equity, transparency, and democratic legitimacy.

Each district is divided into Resorts and the boundaries are established by separate law as provided in Article 26, paragraph I of the Constitution. In the 2025 General Elections, there were sixty-two (62) Resorts.

The Constitution stipulates that there should be at least one polling station for each Resort. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, there were six hundred and seventy-three (673) polling stations, each with a staff of ten (10) persons. The distribution of roles for the staff included a chairperson, vice-chairperson, three (3) members and five (5) substitutes. The chair and vice-chair must have previously worked in an election.

The Constitution also specifies that a main polling station shall be established for each district for both the election of the members of the National Assembly and the resort councils. It further outlines that the boundaries of the districts and Resorts coincide, as indicated by their respective decrees.

The main polling station shall have a staff of five members, one of whom shall be chairman, one acting chairman and three deputy members. The Chairman can choose a secretary from the staff. The chairman is the district commissioner of the district in which the principal polling station is located. The chairman, members, and deputy members are appointed and dismissed by the president.

A Central Polling Authority for the election of members of The National Assembly is also required by law. It is seated in Paramaribo and is comprised of seven (7) members who are appointed by the president for a period of five (5) years. The Central Chief Electoral Bureau is charged with a number of duties, some of which are:

- a. the nomination of the members of The National Assembly;
- b. the determination of the composition of The National Assembly based on the results of the elections for members of The National Assembly; and
- c. verifying the determination by the Chief Voting Officers, of the composition of the resort councils and district councils, respectively, based on the results of the resort council elections.

Until the 2020 elections, Suriname was divided into 10 constituencies (see Table 1 below), corresponding to the 10 administrative districts, each electing a fixed number of Assembly members (ranging from 2 to 17 per district). Under the old system, each district was allocated a set number of seats regardless of population. This often meant that votes in smaller districts carried more weight than those in the densely populated ones, creating an unfair advantage in the opinion of some voters and representatives. A landmark Constitutional Court ruling on 5 August 2022 struck down this system, affirming the principle of equal suffrage. The aforementioned October 2023 amendment by Suriname’s parliament came in response to this ruling.

<b>CONSTITUENCIES</b>			
1	Brokopondo	6	Para
2	Commewijne	7	Paramaribo
3	Coronie	8	Saramacca
4	Marowijne	9	Sipaliwini
5	Nickerie	10	Wanica

*Table 1 shows the 10 constituencies prior to the October 2023 ruling*

In the 25 May 2025 elections, fourteen (14) parties (*see Appendix 1*) contested and fielded candidates for all fifty-one (51) seats in the unicameral National Assembly, as was stipulated by the new electoral law. In 2020, seventeen (17) parties had contested the elections.

The relevant legislative framework is encapsulated in the table below (see Appendix 2 for further details).

No.	Legal Instrument	Description
1	Constitution	<p><b>Chapter IX</b> Article 53 and 54 sets the foundation for the Principles of Democratic State Organization which outlines the:</p> <p>(a) Political democracy characterizing the participation and representation of the Surinamese people, in establishing a democratic political system, as well as in their participation in legislation and administration. It also created the condition for their participation in general and free elections.</p> <p>(b) Political Organization, that is, recognition of the rights of citizens to establish political organizations ensuring strict compliance to Article 53</p> <p>(c) Basic principles for the functioning of the institutions of Government: registration of voters, responsibilities of higher and lower institutions of government.</p>
2	Bulletin of Acts and Decree No. 61 of 1987	GENERAL DECREE A-24 Decree of 22 September 1987 containing regulations pertaining to political organizations (Decree on Political Organizations S.B. 1987 No. 61), as amended by S.B. 2019 No. 54.
3	Decree on the Registration of Political Organizations - No: 21 of 2010	GOVERNMENT DECREE of 12 February 2010 implementing Article 7, paragraph 7 of the Decree on Political Organizations (SB 1987 No. 61) (Decree on Registration of Political Organizations)

4	Official Gazette No. 62 of 1987	This instrument of 29 September 1987, concerning rules for the election of members for the representative bodies of the people in Suriname (Elections Regulation). It informs on the election, structure and compositions of key election institutions: the Independent Electoral Council (OKB), the national assembly and the councils of resorts, political organizations, voters register and list, nomination of candidates for national assembly and districts and voting. Its amendment to Article 24, 2023 No. 158, established one (1) constituency for the purpose of electing members to the National Assembly.
5	Official Gazette from the Republic of Suriname No: 16 2025,	Resolution of 6 February 2025 No. 14.228/24, containing the publication ( in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Suriname) of the currently applicable text of the Electoral Regulations No. 62 of 1987, that was last amended by SB 2025 No. 8

*Table 2 shows the components of the Legal Framework*

**Voters List**

The Minister of Home Affairs is responsible for keeping a voters’ register, which is updated daily. The register lists the people included in the Central Population Register who are eligible to vote (Article 13 of Official Gazette of the Republic of Suriname). All inhabitants who are residents of Suriname on the fortieth day before the day of the election, who possess Surinamese nationality, and have reached the age of eighteen are eligible to vote. The voters’ lists can be inspected from the thirtieth day before their closing at the Ministry of Home Affairs and in the districts at the District Committees, as well as at the police station, by electors. Any person can present a written request to the Minister of Home Affairs for the lists of electors to be corrected and/or supplemented once they have reason to do so. The Minister shall decide on this request within five days. This request must be made no later than the fortieth day before the day of the nomination of candidates (Article 17 Election Regulations). The names of persons prohibited by law to vote, shall be submitted in writing by the Minister of Justice to the Minister of Home Affairs, who will then inform these persons and remove their names from the voters’ list. The voters’ lists are closed on the fortieth day before the day of the nomination of candidates. These lists are valid for the election in question, considering the changes and/or additions made during this period, in accordance with the provisions of Article 17. The Elections Office then approves the electoral rolls after checking them.

The register of voters for the 2025 general elections showed a total of three hundred and ninety-nine thousand, nine hundred and thirty-two (399,932) voters, which comprised one hundred and ninety-nine thousand, three hundred and ninety-seven (199,397) males and two hundred thousand, five hundred and thirty-five (200,535) females.

## **Nomination of Candidates**

The candidates named for election shall be chosen within the structures of the political organization involved. Pursuant to the General Decree A-24 of 22 September 1987, a political organization shall have legal personality with a political goal to achieve the objectives. Further amendments in Article 7 of the General Decree, allowed for political organizations to be registered once in a public register held by the Independent Electoral Bureau. The lists are submitted for the election on the day of nomination, both in writing and digitally.

At least fourteen days before nomination of candidates, the candidates' list, signed by at least the majority of the Executive Board, including the President or his replacement who are entitled to vote, shall be publicly announced by the Central Polling Authority. The names of candidates will be placed on the lists in the order in which the signatories prefer them, indicating their names, initials and respective places of residence.

Parties must also present proof of their authorization and any other documentations requested by the Decree, the application, and each candidate's written consent, along with the party's deposit, which is refundable within thirty (30) days after the declaration of the election results, once the party's results meet the requirements stipulated by law. These documents must be submitted between 34 and 29 days prior to the date set for the nomination of candidates. The registration takes place at the Central Elections Office between the hours of 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

A total of fifty-one (51) candidates registered for the National Assembly election, one hundred and twenty (120) for the district, and seven hundred and eight six (786) for the local council.

## V. ELECTION DAY OBSERVATIONS

### Deployment of the CEOM

Suriname's large geographical expanse, the number of geographical districts (10), and the six hundred and seventy-three (673) polling stations presented a challenge for the CEOM to provide total coverage. Despite this resource constraint and the environmental conditions (overcast with persistent scattered showers resulting in soggy soil), the team, working in pairs, was ingeniously assigned to districts to maximize coverage and depth of the assessment, ensuring that each member's skills were utilized effectively.

On election day, the CEOM was able to conduct standardized evaluations, data collection, and interviews in 136 polling stations spanning six (6) districts, namely, Commewijne, Coronie, Marowijne, Paramaribo, Saramacca, and Wanica, ensuring quality and consistency despite the reduced scope.

The community engagements and pre-election day dry run also provided an opportunity to extend the scope of the mission and to assess districts in the hinterland of the country. These visits provided a related context to better understand the information shared in previously held engagements. They also allowed for assessment of the preparations for the elections and a broader understanding and appreciation for the cultural and ethnic diversity of the country.

The objectives for election day were to:

- Document observations and comments;
- Engage various stakeholders, such as election day staff, agents, voters etc. to get a better understanding of the climate;
- Be open, objective, and avoid using personal national context to influence the observations;
- Use the outcomes of the pre-election consultations, including the new amendments to the constitution, to assist in the observation; and
- Be true ambassadors.

The CEOM was divided into five (5) teams. All teams were assigned to observe the opening and closing of the polls in Paramaribo. This decision was taken to allow for timely arrival of the teams at their assigned polling stations and also to allow for the support staff (drivers and protocol officers) to cast their ballots, as most were registered at polling stations in Paramaribo.

### Opening of the Polls

The CEOM team was informed, through discussions with the Ministry of Home Affairs, that all Presiding Officers would collect the election materials from their main polling stations at 4:00

a.m. on the morning of 25 May (election day). The voting period was from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., except to accommodate voters already in line.

All teams arrived at their assigned polling stations early, i.e., between 6:15 a.m. and 6:28 a.m. The opening of six (6) polling stations was observed. On arrival at these stations, it was noted that the physical space was organized and cordoned off with caution tape, showing clearly the seating areas for staff and the OKB representative, and the location of the ballot boxes. It was also observed that seats were placed on the outside of the polling stations to accommodate political party/polling agents. Nevertheless, these agents had a clear view of the inside.

The early arrival of the teams allowed for the opportune introduction and elucidation with staff and collection of relevant polling station data. The OKB representatives and the security staff arrived before 7:00 a.m. Two (2) stations had their full staff complement; the election materials were already in place; and the process of checking off these materials had begun. These stations also opened on time. At the other polling stations, the teams witnessed the arrival of the polling materials from 6:45 a.m. to 7:22 a.m., the entire checking of the ballots and other materials and the beginning of the voting process. These stations opened late, between 7:13 a.m. and 8:18 a.m. As a consequence of the late opening, there were long queues of voters waiting to cast their ballots.

Before voters were allowed to vote, the CEOM observed the pre-commencement processes. The ballot boxes were emptied by the chairman who then showed them to the staff and voters present to confirm that they were empty. The boxes were then secured with the cable straps and placed in the cordon off area in full view of all who were present. As the team interfaced with voters at the stations visited, there were no complaints about the ballot boxes.

## VI. The Voting Process

The Republic of Suriname only allows in-person voting. As a consequence, there is no advance or overseas voting. Proxy voting is allowed by law (Article 110, Election Regulations) for election day workers, including police and army officers working outside a 30-kilometre radius from their polling stations.

During the voting process, the chairperson or vice-chairperson and two members of the polling station must be present at all times. The CEOM noted that even where staff were either late or absent, there were more than the number of staff stipulated by the Election Regulations during the execution of the poll.

The voting process followed after the chairman's invitation to do so. The CEOM noted that each voter's identity was checked. They were asked to present two (2) forms of identification, their identification card or another picture ID and their polling card. Polling cards were personally delivered to voters at their homes by a colporteur between May 1 to 15 and were available at the District Commissioner's office up to three days before polling day. The undistributed cards were among materials sent to the polling stations to be further dispersed. The team also noted that many of these cards were distributed to voters as they turned up to vote and the necessary checks were done. The CEOM also observed the preparation and presentation of blank cards to voters who had lost their cards.

The CEOM observed that once the voter's identity was confirmed, his/her name was announced, allowing polling agents outside to cross-reference the voters' names on their list. The voters were then issued with two ballots (National Assembly and district) and their hands were checked and inked before they proceeded to vote.

At the start of the voting process, the CEOM observed that voters' identities and names were consistently checked across the polling stations visited. All other protocols, such as the checking of hands, inking of fingers and distributing and depositing the ballots in the various boxes, were also followed consistently. It must be noted, however, that little or no instructions about the voting process were given to the voters. They were simply handed the ballots. With a few exceptions, this was the practice throughout the entire day's observation. Although most presiding officers omitted this process, supporters of the various parties provided this information to voters as they entered the various venues. Elderly voters and those with disabilities were given preference to vote and assistance where necessary.

The CEOM observed that many polling staff were quite knowledgeable about their tasks. They worked confidently and diligently with steady pace throughout the day. However, other teams lacked similar confidence and knowledge. In these cases, the flow of voting was much slower.

The matter of the secrecy of the ballot was of concern to the CEOM team. The court's judgment awarded to the Wang Okasi Foundation to allow voters with disability to have their companions cast their vote was in full effect in the most polling stations visited and this was commendable. In Saramacca, however, the team witnessed a heated discussion between the two major parties' representatives over a family of two who were denied this right by the poll staff who insisted that the ballot be marked by a member of the staff. Clearly, the poll team was unaware of the court's decision in the Wang Okasi case. The matter was resolved where the family's companion was allowed to assist one member and the other was able to vote personally.

Further concern about the secrecy related to the location of the staff who had responsibility for the voting booths and the booth's design. In most cases, the assigned monitor for the booth stood in close proximity, giving them a direct view of the voter's ballot and, by extension, their choices. Additionally, the manner in which the voters' engaged with the ballot, created opportunities for the secrecy of the vote to be compromised.

The configuration at the front of the polling booth acted as a barrier to the voter. The booth was wide to facilitate the width of the ballot paper; however, it did not allow the voter to enter, similar to the one used by voters in wheelchairs. Entering the booth rather than standing at the front of it, would have provided greater privacy to the voter and therefore safeguarded the secrecy of the ballot.

A new addition to the 2025 elections was the use of a mobile application developed to provide real-time data on the voter turnout. The CEOM witnessed this intervention in full operation. As voters presented their identification cards, their ID numbers were entered in the system. The voter's name and ID number were displayed on the tablet and the number of voters at that time was revealed. As the CEOM traversed throughout the country it was evident that the unreliability of the internet seriously affected the full functioning of the mobile application such that the real-time information was not always available.

## VII. Closing of Poll

The CEOM observed the closing of the polls at the stations where the opening had been observed. These polling stations closed at the stipulated time and in one case, after the last voters in line voted. There was a break of at least one hour after the close of poll to allow staff to refresh themselves. At the resumption, the clerical task of preparing documents was long and tedious. The counting of the ballots followed in earnest. The party agents witnessed from the outside. While the polling officer was diligent in announcing and displaying each ballot so all could corroborate the vote, this verification process proved difficult for the party agents. They reported that the information communicated could not be verified as the circles selected were too small to be observed from a distance.

The CEOM believes that the procedures during the counting process were necessary to ensure the result revealed the true intention of the voters. However, at times the pace at which the process was executed was painfully slow. Further, in one of the stations, the reconciliation process of voting cards with ballots and even the confirmation of the National Assembly results proved very challenging to the staff. It took at least three sets of consultations among staff and the intervention of the OKB representative and party agents to arrive at a satisfactory count. Additionally, the posting of results on the outside was not consistent among the stations observed.

## VIII. POLLING DAY CONCLUSION

The atmospheric conditions on election day contributed to a mixed weather pattern. There were heavy showers at the time the team was ready to embark on the election day exercise at 5:00 a.m., and intermittently throughout the day. Bursts of sunshine helped to dry the waterlogged, ground, allowing for safer traversing. Despite the day's weather, the team remained diligent, committed and focused on the task and this contributed to a successful CEOM exercise.

The voters must be commended for their calm and patience as they eagerly awaited their turn to vote. They also demonstrated what can be described as "political maturity" as they engaged with and supported each other even while visibly identified by their respective party paraphernalia. This high level of comradery and embracing spirit set the tone for a peaceful day.

The CEOM concluded that they conducted a successful exercise in an environment that was inclusive and peaceful. The pre-election, election day and post-election engagements with stakeholders provided useful information to guide the mission's operations. Despite the best efforts of all stakeholders who were engaged in the planning and execution of the 25 May 2025 elections, there were pre-polling concerns and inconsistencies in some polling stations that created nervousness and distrust among stakeholders about the results. The CEOM believes that the checks and balances that are enshrined in Suriname's Election Regulations and, by extension, the Constitution, once applied appropriately, will safeguard the will of the people.

## **IX. POST-ELECTION OBSERVATIONS**

On 26 May, the CEOM visited the Central Polling Station in Paramaribo to assess the post-election atmosphere. The CEOM observed that the venue was fully guarded by the military and local police. On entering the venue, the CEOM noted that the ballot boxes and kits were well organized by districts and the circumference of the area was cordoned off. The CEOM convened a meeting with the official in charge who provided an explanation on the procedure to be followed to ascertain the final result. The assessment process began at 5:00 p.m. in the presence of many party supporters.

### **Atmosphere in the Country**

In light of the concerns raised by stakeholders about the late opening of some polling stations, the operational challenges encountered with some polling staff in the executing of their duties and the need to conduct repeated counts to verify the election results, the country anxiously awaited the conclusion of the final process. The atmosphere at the Central Polling Station however, remained charged as party supporters intensely followed the recounting process and the confirmation of the final results.

### **Level of Acceptance of Results**

The CEOM departed Suriname on Tuesday, 27 May 2025. At the time of departure, the recounting of ballots at the Central Polling Station was still in progress. It was evident from the comments made through many of the media platforms and some party leaders that there were some concerns about the preliminary pronouncements. The narrow margin in the results of the major parties, the operational issues at some polling stations, and the pre-election concerns, continued to weigh heavily on the minds of some stakeholders. Nevertheless, the staff at the Central Polling Station continued to transparently review the polling station data before making the final declaration of the results.

### **Final Results**

The preliminary results of the 25 May 2025 general elections in the republic of Suriname showed that no party had won the majority of seats that was needed to declare a clear winner. A total of two hundred and seventy-seven thousand seven hundred and thirty-seven (277,737) voters participated in the elections. Of these, two hundred and seventy-three thousand seven hundred and seventy-six (273,776) or 98.57% were valid while three thousand nine hundred and sixty-one (3,961) or 1.43 % were invalid. Voter turnout was 69.25%. Based on the proportionate representation system, seven of the fourteen parties which contested the elections gained seats. The table below shows the distribution of seats. Notwithstanding the challenges experienced during the elections, the CEOM believed that they were not significant to impact the preliminary

or final results and that they reflected the will of the people. The final results, now released, confirmed those of the preliminary count.

No	Party	Leader	% of vote received	# of Seats
1	NDP	Jennifer Geerlings-Simons	34.18	18
2	VHP	Chan Santokhi	31.80	17
3	ABOP	Ronnie Brunswijk	11.62	6
4	NPS	Gregory Rusland	11.40	6
5	PL	Paul Somohardjo	03.76	2
6	A20	Andrew Baasaron	02.73	1
7	BEP	Ronie Asabina	02.61	1
	<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>98.10</b>	<b>51</b>

*Table 3 shows the distribution of seats following the elections*

## **X. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The CARICOM Election Observation Mission had a successful undertaking in the Republic of Suriname between 19 and 27 May 2025. The eleven-member team engaged many stakeholder groups and individuals and visited communities to get a true picture of the election climate and understand the issues that were relevant to the electors. As a consequence of these engagements, the CEOM concluded that the elections were peaceful and voters were able to exercise their franchise without intimidation. Additionally, although the team witnessed some irregularities that impacted the conduct of the general elections, such as challenges for some parties to register their candidates for the district elections, late start at some polling stations, uncertainty of who should assist the disabled in marking their ballot, and inefficient polling staff, these did not directly impact the result of the elections.

Given the discrepancies witnessed, the CEOM recommends the following, which it believes will further strengthen the election execution process.

### **1. Continued voter education:**

Greater voter education (VE) is highly recommended. The VE exercises introduced in the pre-election phase helped to inform the population about the new election law and how it impacted the voting process. However, if the objective of the new electoral system is to advance equity, transparency, and democratic legitimacy, as echoed by the election slogan (“One people, one vote, one value”), the CEOM recommends that the entire population must be considered when messages are disseminated. The messages must be curated and disseminated to promote inclusivity for all regardless of the ethnicity, geographical space, language, or age.

### **2. Campaign financing:**

Stakeholders believed that the time has come for the Republic of Suriname to consider the introduction of laws to address the issue of campaign/political financing. While there is no legislation on this matter, Article 53:3(e) of the Constitution of the Republic of Suriname stipulated that political organizations’ income sources and accounts shall be published annually in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Suriname and at least one daily newspaper. According to the OKB, this section has not been enforced. The CEOM, therefore, recommends that the authorities make every effort to enforce this requirement. The CEOM further recommends a national dialogue on this issue of campaign financing and encourage that the findings be implemented. The implementation of legislation to address campaign financing can only bring greater transparency to the electoral process.

### **3. Polling stations in the hinterland:**

Most polling stations are set up in schools. The challenge in the hinterland was the absence of schools in many communities. As a consequence, persons had to travel by bus or boat to vote. Further, internal migration from the hinterland to Paramaribo to access basic services (health, school) and seek employment caused the relocation of many electors. While these electors expressed that they were willing to vote, getting back to the hinterland was challenging. A precedent was set in the 2020 COVID period elections where **mobile polling stations** were instituted. This could have been applied in 2025. It could also be the practice going forward.

### **4. Training for polling staff:**

Effective training of election staff is critical to the smooth execution of any elections. The Ministry of Home Affairs confirmed that the electoral staff underwent significant training that was in keeping with the law and which allowed them to effectively manage the polling stations. However, the withdrawal of five hundred (500) or seven (7) percent of trained staff just before the elections created a void that was filled with less qualified staff. The CEOM recommends that the MOHA ensures that they are able to maintain a cadre of trained staff to satisfy the requirements by law and have a qualified backup team to fill gaps at short notice. Additionally, the training should be over a longer period (presently 4 days) to ensure that staff is adequately prepared for the task.

### **5 Voting booth:**

The configuration and position of the voting booth did not adequately facilitate the secrecy of the ballot. The CEOM recommends the following:

- ❖ Firstly, the booths should be configured to allow the voter to enter similar to that used by the challenged voters. Entering the booth would provide greater privacy to the voters as they cast their ballots.
- ❖ Secondly, if cost becomes a factor to replace the voting booths, then a repositioning of the booth to have the back facing the polling staff can be an alternative. The repositioning will help to maintain the secrecy of the ballot by reducing the risk of exposure of the ballot to staff, party agents, and observers.

### **6 Introduction of early voting:**

The CEOM noted that some polling staff were unable to exercise their franchise on polling day. They expressed that the constant flow of voters and the commitment to the task at

hand were the main reasons to forgo the opportunity to vote. Although Article 110 of the election regulations allowed for voters to have a proxy once they were working outside a radius of 30 kilometres from their polling stations, they did not utilize this provision. In this regard, the CEOM recommends an amendment to the Surinamese Constitution to include early voting for all security personnel (police, military, axillary) and polling staff. This provision can be an incentive to encourage greater participation in the vote. Additionally, staff will be more relaxed and focused to concentrate of their assigned polling day tasks.

**7 Registration of candidates:**

The CEOM recommends that all parties be familiar with and comply with the regulations that guide the process of registration of candidates, especially for the district councils. The fact that some parties had to sacrifice the registration of candidates in some districts for the greater good of the country (*A20 vs The State*) meant too, that some district voters were disenfranchised because they were not able to vote for the candidates of their choice. Furthermore, it is recommended that all authorities should be guided by the principles of the election regulations and be consistent when providing guidance to political parties.

# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1

### Political Parties that Participated in 2025 Elections

	Party	Abbreviation	English Translation
1.	Alternatief 2020	A20	Alternative 2020
2.	Algemene Bevrijdings- en Ontwikkelingspartij	ABOP	General Liberation and Development Party
3.	Arena Politieke Partij	APP	Arena Political Party
4.	Broederschap en Eenheid in de Politiek	BEP	Brotherhood and Unity in Politics
5.	Democratisch Alternatief '91	DA'91	Democratic Alternative '91
6.	De Nieuwe Leeuw	DNL	The New Lion
7.	Nationale Democratische Partij	NDP	National Democratic Party
8.	Nationale Partij Suriname	NPS	Suriname National Party
9.	Optie voor Suriname	OPTSU	Option for Suriname
10.	Pertjaja Luhur	PL	Glorious Empire
11.	Partij Van Communicatie	PVC	Party for Communication
12.	Democratische Unie Suriname	DUS	Democratic Union of Suriname
13.	Vooruitstrevende Hervormings Partij	VHP	Progressive Reform Party
14.	Volkspartij Leefbaar Suriname	VLS	People's Party (for a) Liveable Suriname

## **Appendix 2**

### **Constitution of the Republic of Suriname**

#### CHAPTER IX

#### PRINCIPLES OF DEMOCRATIC STATE ORGANIZATION

##### First Section

##### POLITICAL DEMOCRACY

1. All political power is vested in the people and shall be exercised in accordance with the Constitution.
2. The political democracy is characterized by the participation and representation of the Surinamese people, which shall express itself through the participation of the people in establishing a democratic political system, as well as in their participation in legislation and administration aimed at the maintenance and expansion of this system. Political democracy shall further create the condition for the participation of the people in general and free elections by secret ballot for the composition of the representative organs and of the Government.
3. Accountability to the people, supervision of government actions by organs created for that purpose and the right of recall with respect to elected representatives are guarantees for true democracy.

##### Second Section

##### POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS Article 53

1. The State recognizes the right of citizens to establish political organizations, subject to the limitations originating in the law.
2. Political organizations respect national sovereignty and democracy.
3. In exercising their rights, the political organizations shall take the following into account:
  - a. Their objectives shall not be in violation of or be incompatible with the Constitution and the law.
  - b. the organizations shall be accessible to each Surinamese citizen who meets the criteria to be defined by law, if he agrees with the basic principles of the party.

- c. The internal organization must be democratic, which shall be evidenced, inter alia, by: - - regular committee elections. The prerequisite that candidates nominated for election to the people's representative bodies shall be elected within the party structure.
- d. The electorate shall be informed of the political program and the election program of the political organizations.
- e. income sources and accounts shall be published annually in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Suriname and at least one daily newspaper.
- f. Their functioning shall be in accordance with the principles of good administration, and with prescribed legal rules for the guarantee of openness and transparency.
- g. the drafting of a program, with as its single goal the promotion of national interest.

### Third Section

#### BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR THE FUNCTIONING OF THE INSTITUTIONS OF GOVERNMENT

##### Article 54

1. The State is obligated to register all voters and to notify them to participate in the elections. The registration of the voters shall serve no other purpose. The voters are obligated to cooperate with the registration of the electorate.
2. For the organization and the functioning of the institutions of government, the following principles shall be respected:
  - a. decisions of higher institutions of government shall be binding upon lower institutions. This rule does not apply to judicial institutions.
  - b. lower institutions of government shall be answerable to the higher institutions and shall render account of their work.
  - c. the administrative and executive institutions shall be subject to control by the representative bodies.
  - d. The freedom of discussion, criticism and recognition of the minority by the majority shall apply in all councils and state institutions.
  - e. Those who hold political office shall be liable in civil and in criminal law for their acts and omissions.

f. Those who hold political office shall be under the obligation to fulfil their tasks in public interest. g. No one shall be nominated for life in any political office.

h. The central government should take care of a well-organized, regular dissemination of information on government policy and government administration to enable the people to optimally participate in the administrative structures. The lower government shall have the obligation to create a process of communication with the people, for the purpose of making the Government answerable to the public and to ensure the participation of the people in policymaking.

### **Appendix 3**

#### **Arrival Statement of the CARICOM Election Observation Mission**

Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) have committed to supporting Member States, on their request, by providing an independent, impartial and honest assessment of the preparations for and conduct of General Elections. In this context, the Government of Suriname invited the Caribbean Community to deploy a CARICOM Election Observation Mission (CEOM) to observe the conduct of General Elections to be held on 25 May 2025.

In response to the invitation, the CARICOM Secretariat has deployed a nine-member team to observe the Elections in the Republic of Suriname.

The CEOM is headed by Ms. Dora James, Supervisor of Elections, St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Other members of the team are:

- Mr. Alrick Daniel, Member of the Electoral Commission of Antigua and Barbuda;
- Mr. Harrison Thompson, Parliamentary Commissioner of The Bahamas;
- Ms. Debra Patricia Hughes, Member of the Electoral and Boundaries Commission of Barbados;
- Mr. Clement Rohee, Commissioner, Guyana Elections Commission;
- Ms. Rose Therese Georges, Counsellor in the Electoral Office of Haiti;
- Mr. Herman St. Helen, Chief Elections Officer of the Electoral Department of Saint Lucia;
- Ms. Brendalyn Henry, Regional Manager, Electoral Office of Jamaica; and
- Ms. Lena Champa Sahadeo, Deputy Chief Election Officer of Trinidad and Tobago.

The CEOM is supported by three (3) members of the CARICOM Secretariat:

- (i) Ms. Shae-Alicia Lewis, Programme Manager, Community Relations;
- (ii) Mr. David Allens, Project Officer, Foreign and Community Relations; and
- (iii) Ms. Denise Morgan, Stenographer II, Foreign and Community Relations.

The core team, comprising the Chief of Mission and the CARICOM Secretariat support staff, arrived in Suriname on Monday, 19 May 2025 while the remaining members of the Mission will arrive in Suriname between 21 and 22 May 2025.

Since the team's arrival, a courtesy call has been paid on His Excellency Albert Ramdin, Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Business and International Cooperation. The

team has also had the opportunity to familiarise itself with some of the security measures in place to ensure the safety of the elections through a visit to the Command Centre.

Following the arrival press conference this afternoon, meetings were also held with representatives of various political parties. Engagements will continue throughout the week with other stakeholders and civil society organisations, including the Youth Council, the Inter-Religious Council (IRIS), representatives of Indigenous and Maroon communities, and the Anti-Fraud Platform, among others.

The CEOM looks forward to also engaging with the Chair of the National Assembly; Minister of Home Affairs; and the Chair of the Independent Electoral Council (OKB), and to participating in the OKB information session for international election observers on 23 May 2025.

The CEOM's engagement over the next few days is intended to provide an understanding of the pre-election environment. The team will also monitor the Polling Day activities, including the opening, conduct, and closing of the polls through to the tabulation of the ballots and declaration of the results. Throughout the Mission, the CEOM will collect qualitative and quantitative data regarding the entire electoral process, including the actions and conduct of election officials, political actors, and other stakeholders, to assess the extent to which they contributed to the overall electoral environment.

Following the Election Day activities, there will be a press conference and the CEOM will issue a Preliminary Statement of its observations. The content will highlight the scope and the findings of the Mission. A final report will be prepared and submitted to the Secretary-General of the Caribbean Community. This Report will be shared with the Government of Suriname, the Leader of the Opposition, the Ministry of Home Affairs, and the Independent Electoral Council. It will also be published on the CARICOM website at <https://caricom.org>. The entire CEOM will depart on 27 May 2025.

The CARICOM Election Observation Mission expresses its gratitude for the invitation extended to participate in this Observation Mission and to support the democratic process in the Republic of Suriname. The Team also extends appreciation to the Surinamese people for their support and the warm hospitality extended thus far. CARICOM wishes the Republic of Suriname a peaceful and successful election exercise.

Thank you.

**Dora James**  
**Chief of Mission**  
**20 May 2025**

## **Appendix 4**

### **Preliminary Statement of the CARICOM Election Observation Mission to Suriname**

Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) have committed to supporting Member States, on their request, by providing an independent, impartial and honest assessment of the preparations for, and conduct of General Elections. In this context, the Government of Suriname invited the Caribbean Community to deploy a CARICOM Election Observation Mission (CEOM) to observe the General Elections on 25 May 2025.

In response to the invitation, the CARICOM Secretariat deployed an eight-member team to observe the Elections in the Republic of Suriname. The Mission comprised election practitioners from Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago. The team was supported by three members of staff from the CARICOM Secretariat.

The entire CEOM arrived in the Republic of Suriname by 22<sup>nd</sup> May and departed on 27 May 2025.

To adequately provide the independent, impartial, and honest assessment referenced earlier, the CEOM set out to:

1. Observe the entire election process in the host country, including the general atmosphere and environmental conditions under which the elections were being conducted; the activities at the polling stations on the day of the elections; the counting and tabulation of votes after the closing of the polls; and the political climate after the announcement of the results;
2. Collect qualitative and quantitative data regarding the entire election process, including the general administration of the election by the election officials, and the conduct of stakeholders such as political actors, civil society, the media, and the voting public at large; and
3. Identify opportunities for improvement and make appropriate and timely recommendations.

### **Pre- Election Period**

During the pre-election period, the CEOM engaged a number of stakeholders whom it believed would provide critical information on the country's electoral laws and practices. These engagements also aided in the further understanding of the political culture and broader environment under which the elections were being held.

The CEOM paid a courtesy call on President Chandrikapersad Santokhi and completed a series of engagements with the Independent Electoral Council, the Directorate of National Security, the

National Assembly, the Ministry of Home Affairs, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Business and International Cooperation. The CEOM also met representatives of several political parties and civic organisations, including the Association of Indigenous Village Chiefs (VIDS), the Inter-Religious Council, the National Youth Council, the Anti-Fraud Platform, the Wang Okasi Foundation, the Maroon Tribes of Suriname (KAMPOS), and local government officials in the districts of Brokopondo, Wanica, Matta, Bernarddorp and Para including two *basjas*.

During these engagements, some key concerns were raised, including:

- Training of polling day staff;
- Exclusion of candidates from the local council ballots;
- The implications of the October 2023 amendment to the electoral law;
- Claims of potential voter fraud;
- Public education, especially for Indigenous and Maroon communities; and
- Security of the new plastic ballot boxes.

### **Election Day**

On polling day, the team visited 136 polling stations across six (6) districts, namely, Commewijne, Coronie, Marowijne, Paramaribo, Saramacca, and Wanica.

The team observed the polling activities, which included the opening of the polls, the voting process, the closing of the polls, and the counting of ballots.

The team made the observations below.

The CEOM team witnessed the opening and closing of the polls in polling stations across Paramaribo and concluded that the pre-poll and opening procedures were followed. The Mission further observed that there was a sufficient supply of the required voting materials at polling stations. Nonetheless, several polling stations in Paramaribo experienced delayed openings, with some delays exceeding an hour and a half. Furthermore, while most of these stations were fully staffed, some did not have a full staff complement. Some polling staff also appeared to show a lack of confidence in the execution of their duties. These factors contributed to delays in the voting process in these specific stations.

As the CEOM traversed the various districts throughout the day to witness the voting process, it was evident that the polling stations visited were conveniently located and easily accessible to most of the voters, including those with physical disabilities. Voting was generally conducted in an orderly manner and most polling staff were efficient in the conduct of their duties. It was further observed that political party representatives mostly witnessed the voting process outside

of the polling stations. Some representatives raised concerns about not being able to hear clearly as the names of electors were called. Consequently, at times they were either unable to cross off or record the name of the elector, especially in cases where names were similar.

The innovation undertaken by the Surinamese government in introducing new voting booths was noted, and the availability of three or more voting booths per station, including one designated for wheelchair users, contributed to the efficiency of the process. It was further noted, however, that the positioning and configuration of the voting booths could be improved to guarantee the secrecy of the vote.

Polling stations closed promptly at 7:00 p.m. and the closing procedures were generally adhered to. Thereafter, it was noted that the aforementioned challenges regarding the staff shortage and staff preparation also affected the orderly counting of the ballots in some polling stations visited. This necessitated the intervention of the Independent Electoral Council (OKB) staff. During the ballot counting phase, political party representatives were located either inside or outside of the polling stations. The presence of some representatives inside the stations indicates that electoral officials had made an effort to alleviate stakeholder concerns regarding the ability to identify the voter's choice from outside the station. The concern was considered valid based on the experience of the CARICOM observers and would still be considered relevant in the case of those party representatives viewing the procedure from outside the polling station.

### **Conclusion**

While there were some operational and staffing challenges, overall, the General Elections of 25 May 2025 were peaceful and were conducted in an atmosphere of robust civic engagement and camaraderie among the Surinamese people.

The CEOM will prepare a full report for submission to the Secretary-General of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), which will include recommendations for the conduct of future elections in the Republic of Suriname.

The CARICOM Election Observation Mission expresses its gratitude for the invitation extended to support the democratic process in the Republic of Suriname. The team also extends appreciation to all the stakeholders who contributed to the successful outcome of the Mission.

Thank you.

***Dora James***

***Chief of Mission***

***27 May 2025***