

**Sindh Local Government Elections – Phase 1**

Violence, bar on observation mark Sindh LG elections

KARACHI, November 1, 2015: Although relatively better organized, the local government elections were not free from procedural irregularities and tainted by the afternoon clash in Khairpur district that claimed lives of 11 political workers. In addition, the incidents of restrictions on FAFEN observers for the observation of the voting process as well as counting of votes raised questions about the transparency of the process, says FAFEN statement issued on Sunday.

Voters turned out in considerable numbers to vote for their local representatives during the first phase of election that was held in eight districts of Sindh on Saturday.

FAFEN’s preliminary findings reveal that observers were barred from observation at 11 (8.2%) out of 134 polling stations and from observation of counting processes at another seven (5.2%) polling stations from where the information could be acquired on Election Day. Additionally, there were seven (5.2%) polling stations which did not open at the scheduled official time and as many polling stations where secrecy of ballot was breached. There were nine (6.7%) polling stations where parties and candidates were seen canvassing inside the premises. There were also five (3.7%) polling stations where polling was interrupted due to different reasons, while at four (2.9%) polling stations, voters complained against last minute change in their polling station. At another three (2.2%) polling stations, observers reported that the required election material was not available on time.

FAFEN observation is conducted in strict compliance with the ECP’s Code of Conduct for Observers and FAFEN’s own code, which requires observers to be non-partisan, autonomous, independent and accurate in their observations. All observers are required to sign a legal undertaking about their independence and non-partisanship before being incorporated for observation.

According to ECP’s latest instructions which were passed on to FAFEN at its meeting with ECP officials on October 30, 2015, observers may be summoned as a witness in any administrative and judicial proceedings. Additionally, ECP has also instructed FAFEN to ensure that observers have their accreditation cards signed by the Presiding Officers of the polling stations they observe. FAFEN will return all the accreditation cards to the ECP as a proof that the polling stations were indeed observed.

FAFEN observers are volunteer citizens of Pakistan who are trained at a day-long training session. They are provided with checklists based on electoral laws and rules to ensure that observations would be documented uniformly, minimizing subjectivity and enhancing accuracy.

FAFEN deployed 356 observers – 306 male and 50 female – to observe 1,084 polling stations located in eight districts. Each observer was required to observe at least four polling stations in every sampled Union Council and one in each Ward. Observers spent at least an hour in every polling station to document their observation at three levels – polling environment outside polling stations, voting processes inside polling stations and voting environment in each booth of a polling station.

To complement its direct observation, FAFEN set up a call center where 20 agents collected information from observers throughout Election Day. In addition, a media monitoring cell was also set up. This preliminary report is based on the information collected from the observers as well as media monitoring. However, both information sources are classified and analyzed separately.

Unlike Punjab, where more than one-fourths of the observers were still not accredited after ECP’s instructions, all observers that FAFEN deployed to plan in Sindh were provided with accreditation cards by the respective DROs. However, of the 11 polling stations where observers were reported to have been denied entry for observation, four each were located in Ghotki and Larkana, two were located in Sukkur while one observer was barred from observation at a polling station in Jacobabad.

At seven polling stations across Sindh, FAFEN observers were barred from observing the counting processes. Presiding Officers stopped observers at three polling stations of Larkana, two polling stations of Sukkur and one each of Ghotki and Jacobabad.

Of the 134 polling stations from where the Election Day observation reports were collected, six (4.4%) were reported to have incidence of violence during the polling process. Of these, three were located in Jacobabad and one each in Ghotki, Kashmore and Sukkur.