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## **Media Advisory:**

# **TIPNG Bougainville Referendum Observation Preliminary Statement**

Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> December, 2019 – Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea

### **Introduction**

Transparency International PNG (TIPNG) is the local chapter of the global Transparency Movement and has been operating in Papua New Guinea since 1997. TIPNG's mission is to empower Papua New Guineans to act against corruption.

This statement is a preliminary assessment of the TIPNG Observation of the Bougainville Referendum Polling which was an activity entirely funded by the European Union. The statement will also provide an overview of TIPNG's Observations and highlight key areas which will be covered in depth in a full report that is to be launched before Parliament resumes at the beginning next year

### **Background on Domestic Election Observation**

TIPNG has had significant engagement in the past with both electoral observation and the electoral reform process in Papua New Guinea as part of its vision to see our country strengthen good governance and ensure the rule of law is upheld.

TIPNG Observed the National Elections in 2007, 2012 & 2017 as well the 2013 Local Level Government Election. Electoral Observation has been part of TIPNG's broader engagement with citizens, with over 400 individual volunteers participating to observe the 2017 National Elections across the country.

The TIPNG Electoral Observation reports have been the basis for legislative changes such as the introduction of the Limited Preferential Voting (LPV) and also highlighting weakness in the system which has led to a call to improve on issues such as Voter Identification. Additionally, under the Organic Law on National and Local Level Government Elections TIPNG has had a nominee serving on the Electoral Advisory Committee (EAC), a body which advises the Electoral Commissioner on whether an election should be classified as 'failed'.

### **TIPNG Bougainville Referendum Observers**

TIPNG received accreditation from the Bougainville Referendum Commission (BRC) to field Observers during the week of polling from 25th-29th November 2019 in North and Central

Bougainville. Four (4) Observers were fielded in North Bougainville and five (5) observers in Central Bougainville. Our observer teams were comprised of TIPNG Board & Staff and volunteers from the Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates Commission (IPPC), the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG), the National Research Institute (NRI) and the Public Service Commission (PSC).

The TIPNG Observers played a critical role in the Referendum by observing the conduct of polling and counting, to ascertain if the process was free, open, transparent, democratic and fair – based on national legislation and according to national and international standards. Observers were tasked to maintain a high level of neutrality and professionalism to meet international standards. They were not to interfere in the polling and counting process, but to act as independent observers of the process – not to control or interfere in the conduct of the referendum.

### **Methodology of Observation**

TIPNG's Observation of the Bougainville Referendum was across 28 polling sites in North and Central Bougainville with well over a 100 voters interviewed. TIPNG only observed the Polling Process and not the Counting.

There were two (2) survey tools used, the first to systematically evaluate polling stations & officials and the second tool to collect the views of voters on whether the referendum was free, fair & safe. The surveys were modified from the surveys used in the 2007, 2012 & 2017 National Elections Observation, and to an extent are comparable.

### **Preliminary Findings**

TIPNG thanks the People of Bougainville and the BRC Polling Officials for their unanimous support in answering our survey questions over the week of polling. TIPNG Observers were all welcomed and did not encounter any hostility or violence; in fact most polling stations had a sense of celebration by communities as polling commenced. Furthermore, all voters that were interviewed by TIPNG Observers were forthcoming in their answers and gave answers freely.

The voter surveys were almost all entirely unanimous in their assessment that there were no undue or coercive behaviours, e.g. Bribery, Threats of Violence, Block Voting, etc. Almost all respondents responded that they had not experienced or witnessed issues that have plagued elections in Papua New Guinea in the past, and this was corroborated by the TIPNG Observer teams.

It should be noted that amongst the twenty-eight (28) polling places observed, only one (1) in Central Bougainville, had a serious deficiency as the Secrecy of the Vote was violated by a man from the community seeing how each vote was cast at the ballot booth and in some instances filling in the ballot for electors. It would appear that this was an anomalous incident, however in the absence of other observer reports it is unclear how reflective this incident was of other electoral violations.

While there were other procedural issues by BRC officials, e.g. inadequate provision of provisional votes, limited polling booths, and early close of polling stations before 6pm, etc., these were minor instances and could be easily ascribed to under-resourcing or insufficient training of BRC polling officials.

On the whole the TIPNG Bougainville Referendum Observation preliminary finding is that while there were minor procedural issues, if measured against the standard of previous elections in PNG, the Bougainville Referendum was free, fair & safe and credibly reflects the will of the people of Bougainville.

Due to the instance of an observed electoral violation and of other minor procedural issues, it cannot be said that the Bougainville Referendum was entirely without incident.

#### **Full Report & Interim Recommendation**

TIPNG will release a Full Report later in 2020 with the financial support of the European Union. The report will be released before the first seating of the National Parliament in February 2020. The full report will present the data collected by TIPNG Observers during the Bougainville Referendum.

TIPNG welcomes the official conclusion of the Bougainville Referendum with the return of the writs by the Bougainville Referendum Commission (BRC) to the Governor General of Papua New Guinea on Friday 13th December 2019.

As the governments of Papua New Guinea and the Autonomous Region of Bougainville begin deliberation on the Referendum results, TIPNG strongly recommends that leaders maintain the democratic values captured by the Referendum process.

In the interest of preserving Democracy, leaders in Bougainville and Papua New Guinea, have a duty to be open to citizens as they deliberate on our behalf for an outcome to be ratified by the Government of Papua New Guinea in line with the Bougainville Peace Agreement.

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