



## **Final Report**

# **GENDER ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION (GEOM) Elections Morocco 2015**

In Partnership With:

**National Human Rights Council Morocco**

**People's Rights Centre Morocco**

## **THE MISSION**

**Head of Mission:** Sabra Bano

**Deputy Head of Mission:** Lucyna de Graaf

**International Observer:** Reem Obeidat

**International Observer:** Katharina Stöckli

**Training and International Observer:** Matt Luna

**Management and International Observer:** Brian Blend

**Management and International Observer:** Anisia Mandro

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## **Preface and Acknowledgements**

### **Sabra Bano, Head of Mission**

Gender Concerns International is pleased to witness Morocco's future, working towards an inclusive democracy with women voters and elected leaders, much of which is already becoming a reality today. It was therefore with great honour that we had the opportunity to support women's participation with vital impact in Morocco's first local and regional election since the 2011 constitutional reform.

Our joint Gender Election Observation Mission (GEOM) has worked with people in Morocco as they demonstrated to the region and rest of the world that their country is ready to continue its democratic development for all citizens. The organisation, along with the international community, shares a responsibility with women in Morocco during this development stage. In particular the women who have courageously transformed their notions of full democratic inclusion into action, further paving the way for future generations of women leaders.

The pre-election assessments highlighted the critical nature of a comprehensive approach to women's involvement for the duration of these pivotal elections. In partnership with the National Human Rights Council (CNDH), the People's Rights Center (CDG), Women's Creativity, and the Civil Youth Alliance for Reform (CCJR).

The Mission was launched in Morocco in June 2015 with a pre-election needs assessment, followed by the GEOM to observe and document, from a gender perspective, the voting and post-election processes. Women in Morocco have proudly demonstrated their devotion to democracy with high voter turnout, as well almost double the amount of seats won by women in comparison to the 2009 elections.

First and foremost, I would like to express deep gratitude to our partner organisations and officials from CNDH for their support, guidance, dedication and high level of professionalism that contributed to the great success of this mission.

A particular message of thanks goes to the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Consulate General of The Kingdom of Morocco. I also acknowledge the organisation's appreciation to the people, government, political parties and institutions in Morocco for their hospitality and readiness to assist in aspects of the mission. Cooperation with other national observation missions and with other civil society organisations was welcome at many times during the work.

As the Head of the GEOM, I am also pleased to acknowledge the dedication and tireless work of the mission team which comprised of local staff, partners, domestic and international observers.

These observer teams benefitted greatly from the constant support from staff of the organisations office in Rabat and the headquarters in The Hague.

This Mission makes the conclusions and recommendations in this report independently and in accordance with the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation of the United Nations in October 2005.

**Sabra Bano,**  
**Head of Mission**

# **The Relevance of a Gender based approach to Election Observation**

Through a tailored approach to election observation practices, the organisation believes that sustainable progress can be made towards establishing women in Morocco as active and influential members of political life. A gendered approach possesses the necessary tools to identify discrimination and inequality women may face during electoral processes, and also to challenge these practices from a women's human rights perspective. Through a targeted focus on the gender dimension of electoral processes, electoral observation missions become opportunities for enquiry and investigation into structural systems of gender and discrimination. By addressing these arising issues, value is added to the entire political process. The implications for the future of socio-political participation of women in society are used to devise long-term action plans and programmes to further gender inclusive practices and women's political and economic reform.

With previous successful GEOM missions to Pakistan (2008; 2013), Morocco (2011; 2015), Tunisia (2011; 2014), Libya (2012), and Myanmar (2015), the organisation has acquired the knowledge and expertise to successfully implement the GEOM concept at the local and regional levels.

The GEOM documented and improved conditions for women's inclusion in democratic processes by assembling and training both international and domestic observers to observe elections from a gender perspective. The outcome of the mission identified key recommendations and suggestions for advancing women's political participation, female leadership, and inclusive governance in Morocco.

## **1. Executive Summary of Project**

### **1.1. Context**

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), every citizen has the right to take part in the government of his/her country, directly or through chosen representatives. The will of the people should be considered the basis for the authority of the government and all actions that spring forth from the use of such power and position.<sup>1</sup> These political rights are universally recognised as inalienable and indivisible, and are enshrined in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which has been adopted by Morocco.<sup>2</sup> However, Civil

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<sup>1</sup> The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 21 (<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml>).

<sup>2</sup> The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, Art 7.:

"States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right:

(a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;

(b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;

Society Organizations in Morocco have continually stressed the continuous problems in this regard. Despite the commitment to the CEDAW, Civil Society Organisations argue that the implementation of CEDAW recommendations and the subsequent human rights provisions is severely hampered by a lack of knowledge regarding these recommendations and the resources necessary to implement them. It is thus a vital task to assess the implementation rate and underlying structural causes of poor outreach. These elements must be considered when conducting election observation missions.

Despite constituting the majority of a population in a number of countries, and engaging in a progressive movement towards democratisation in these countries, women remain largely underrepresented at most levels of political and economic decision-making processes. In 1995, the Beijing Platform for Action called upon countries to realise the goal of having 30% of all positions at decision-making levels occupied by women. This Platform highlighted women's rights as human rights, providing it with a status of 'top priority' when it comes to the formulation of public policies and their subsequent implementation. Even with the recognition of the rights of women and the progress made in these last years, the average percentage of women who are currently represented worldwide in political bodies is still at a dismal 20%. The average of women's political participation in Arab States is the lowest in the world, at about 17%.

Numerous solutions have been adopted to address the under-representation of women in the public sphere. Quotas have been successful in many transitional and post-conflict countries, with Morocco adopting a quota of 60 seats reserved exclusively for women. In reality, the obstacles of increasing the number of women in the political sphere are varied; stemming from social and cultural norms, traditions in patriarchal societies and the perpetuation of structural inequalities.

The three rounds of the elections – the regional and local elections, the provincial council elections, and the final electoral process to select members of the House of Councillors – were historic events for Morocco as well as for the GEOM programme in observing elections at local and regional levels around the country for the first time.

## **1.2. Pre-Election Need Assessment Mission**

Having partnered with the National Human Rights Council (CNDH) on a GEOM programme in 2011, the organisation was invited by the CNDH to observe the 2015 elections. To adequately prepare for the mission, a Pre-Election Gender Needs Assessment Mission (PNAM) in June 2015 in Morocco was conducted. The Mission delegation met with representatives of various institutions and civil society organisations and international community members to assess the current situation concerning women's democratic inclusion in the electoral processes and the level of support provided to key stakeholders advocating for women's political participation.

It was the conclusion of the PNAM, that local networks, civil society organisations, and national institutions require gender specific knowledge and expertise to realise the goals of gender inclusive

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(c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.“  
(<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm#article7>)

reform. Gender Concerns was able to equip these organisations with the required skills needed, through introducing the following measures:

- Training programs for election observers from a gender perspective.
- Providing continuous support to CNDH in its efforts to establish a gender unit which could ensure the active and effective participation of women in the election management process as well as the wider socio-political spheres.
- Support and training to local partners which would enhance lobbying efforts for women's rights and equality amongst key decision-making bodies.

These measures will encourage political and socio-economic transformation and sustain the capacity-building ability of the State and civil society organisations. In turn, this will affect sustainable and inclusive change for the democratic future of Morocco.

### **1.3. Partners**

#### **Gender Concerns International**

Gender Concerns is an international development organisation based in The Hague, the Netherlands. It was formed in 2004 by a group of experts with extensive experience in gender and development related fields. Ideals central to the organisation mission include the establishment of a gender-balanced society through the required action in democratic inclusion, poverty reduction, sustainable development, economic empowerment, and policy-making sectors.

The organisation promotes women as agents for change and development, with programme activities focusing on capacity building, lobby and advocacy work, facilitation of training, and the support of women's organisations and relevant civil society organisations. The organisations work has highlighted the gender dimension of developing democracies and the key role of women as agents of change, supporting women's full integration into electoral processes, policy-making positions, and in other vital processes to determine their country's future.

Gender Concerns has extensive experience observing elections from a gender perspective in a number of countries, including Pakistan, Tunisia, and Libya. The organisation's experience in the region places it in a unique position, offering valuable expertise and lessons learned to women in their work towards their rightful place in Morocco's democracy.

The organisation's engagement in Morocco began in 2011 when it conducted a GEOM after an official invitation by the National Human Rights Council of Morocco (CNDH). The organisation applied its GEOM expertise in Morocco for municipal elections.

#### **National Human Rights Council (CNDH)**

The CNDH was created to reinforce and guarantee the respect of Morocco's international commitments in the protection and promotion of human rights, and to reinforce and consolidate the rule of law.

CNDH not only invited the organisation after the national elections 2011 for a second time to conduct

the election monitoring mission in Morocco in 2015, but it also supported the GEOM vision and operational methodology. Gender Concerns expresses its gratitude and appreciation to the CNDH for its commitment to the improvement of gender equality in Morocco.

**People’s Rights Center (CDG)**

As a non-profit, non-governmental organization, the CDG advocates for the protection of all human rights, liberties, and freedoms. In particular, CDG has as its focus the protection of said rights of those groups who are deemed vulnerable and marginalized, such as women, minorities, and people with disabilities, children, and immigrants. It is the aim of CDG to participate in the development of domestic laws in Morocco to adhere to international human rights standards. Gender Concerns’ partnership with the CDG has led to the critical assessment of current laws pertaining to the right to vote and how these laws act to benefit some through the disadvantaging of others. Through the promotion of positive social and political intervention, Gender Concerns and the CDG have been able to shed light on those issues which may work to prevent the economic and political reform of women in Morocco.

**Women’s Creativity**

The association was founded by a group of local women who felt that the needs of women the area of Sefrou needed to be addressed. The organisation focuses on the availability of health care programs, the promotion of educational opportunities for economically disadvantaged children, and various social activities and programs aimed at the social development of vulnerable groups.

**Civil Youth Alliance for Reform (CCJR)**

The CCJR is a youth movement which focuses on problems encountered by young Moroccan nationals, especially those who may be classified as young professionals, graduate students, and unemployed youth. The CCJR works to unite young people in the struggle for social, political, and economic justice and reform. As the CCJR has a reputation for mobilizing young Moroccans to observe elections, the organisation has greatly benefitted from this partnership.

**2. The Composition and the Focus of the Mission**

In the international arena, there is a growing recognition that women’s participation in decision-making bodies is fundamental for achieving gender equality in a just society. Democracy in Morocco cannot be sustainable and be progressive without the equality of men and women. The empowerment of women will contribute to building inclusive governance in the country at national, regional and local level.

The participation of women in electoral processes ranges from participating as voters, candidates, election observers and administrators, as well as judges that resolve electoral complaints. A comprehensive analysis should include an assessment of the participation of women in





elections and should highlight the role they played in the management and the administration of the electoral processes. This assessment will examine whether women in Morocco have played an effective role in the success of the process. Resulting recommendations can improve women's participation and ensure gender-inclusive electoral reforms for the upcoming national elections in 2016.

The mission assisted the CNDH implementing training structures for their proposed 2,500 domestic observers, with gender-focused training programmes. Thus enabling them to conduct gender sensitive municipal election observation missions.

The GEOM was composed of a small-scale international observation team that observed polling centres in major cities and selected towns in various areas of the country. The GEOM is the only international electoral observation mission that observed the elections exclusively from a gender perspective.

It is through this type of initiative that more women can make crucial contributions as leaders and policy makers. This positive change that women can bring from the community to the different levels begins with the free casting of a single vote.

## **2.1. Women in Morocco**

Since the first Constitution of Morocco in 1962, women have enjoyed the right to vote and to run for elective office. By opening new political and public space and freedoms, the changes of the 1990s and 2000s provided women with the opportunity to enter public and political space, organise themselves formally and make demands. This political engagement has led to a series of institutional, legal and policy reforms that have strengthened women's formal rights.

The 2011 Arab Spring protests led to the commencement of a large-scale reformation process in Morocco, led by Civil Society Organizations. Women took advantage of this by pressing for broad constitutional commitments to equality and a stronger legal and institutional rights framework. The new constitution of July 2011 responded to these demands, resulting in a strengthening and institutionalisation of women's rights in Morocco. Quota provisions were passed into law, and the number of reserved seats for women in the parliament increased from 30 to 60 seats out of 395 seats. Notably, only a few women managed to carry seats in their own right. Today women occupy 17% of the seats in the national parliament. This is well below the international recommended figure of 30%.

Despite this progress, women in Morocco continued to be under-represented and face significant discrimination in the public and political life. Discriminatory social norms and practices pose a major challenge to the implementation of the gender reforms. Patriarchal attitudes remain entrenched within much of society in Morocco, with women seen as subordinate to men, belonging to the domestic realm and unsuitable for leadership positions.

### **3. General Framework of the Moroccan Elections**

The local and regional elections on the 4<sup>th</sup> of September 2015, were the first to take place in Morocco since the adoption of the 2011 reform constitution and is the first election under the newly elected Islamist-led government. One of the objectives of the new constitution is the regionalization process, that gives greater autonomy to the country's regions and more power in managing local affairs where such power was previously held by the central government. This means that the newly elected representatives will be held accountable for their governance and their performance on a local level at the end of the five-year term. Therefore the elections are an important opportunity to examine the outcome of the country's "reform under stability" paradigm.

The new constitution contains several articles concerning electoral rights. The articles refer to the right for a free and transparent election that will be held regularly. The constitution also states that the law shall define the rules for voting and ensure equal access for men and women. Although there has been electoral reform, there has not been enough of an increase in education to inform citizens, especially women, of these changes. The impact these articles and the regionalisation of Moroccan power may be too recent for the citizens to feel empowered to hold their elected regional leaders responsible.

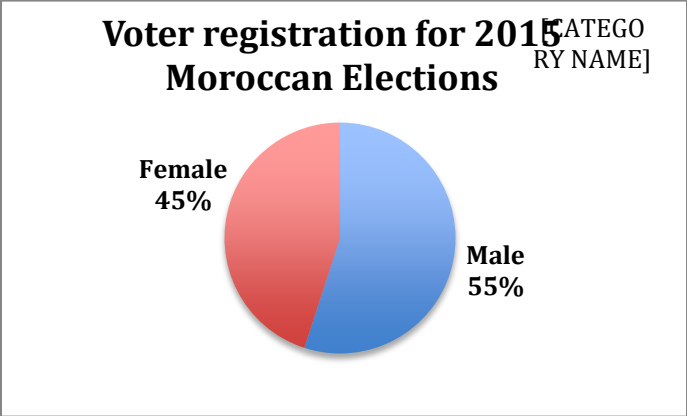
In June 2015, the House of Representatives passed an amendment on the organic law relating to municipalities, regions and local authorities, to increase the ratio of women in positions of power from 12% to 27%. Internationally, the benchmark for women's representation is 30%, and this amendment, although falling short, aims to meet global standards. One impact of this positive discrimination measure was the increase in the female candidature. Women represented 21.94% of all applicants for the local elections and 38.64% for regional elections. Each party list consisted of two parts: the first included the names of both male and female candidates whose number corresponded to seats, while the second included the names of female candidates whose number corresponded to the seats reserved exclusively for women.

#### **3.1 Accreditation of Electoral Observers**

A notable change to the constitution was the addition of a law that requires independent election observation. Morocco is among the few countries in the world to have this in their constitution. The Special Commission for the Accreditation of Election Observers is chaired by the CNDH chairman Driss El Yazami and includes 4 members representing the 4 ministries, 5 members from civil society organisations representing the CNDH, a member from the National Authority for Integrity and Prevention and Fight against Corruption and a member from the inter-ministerial department for human rights. It is significant to note the structure of the special commission did not have an enforced quota for female participation. The composition of the special commission is informed by the legislative framework and adheres to recommended international standards. The special commission accredited 34 Moroccan associations and 6 international NGO's as well as the CNDH.

**3.2 Voter registration**

In order to cast their vote, citizens must have been registered on the electoral roll. Since August 2015, around 1.1 million new voters registered on Morocco’s electoral lists, 46% of whom were women. The increase in registered voters has been attributed to the amended electoral law from late 2014 and the subsequent campaign, although no formal observation took place during this period. The changes include online registration and now allow third party help with registration. The emphasis of the campaigns was targeted at Moroccans who recently turned 18 and for those living overseas. There was no gender specific campaigning, which may be one of the reasons less women registered than men, as well as the need to possess a National Identity (CIN) to register. Access to obtaining a CIN requires several documents such as a birth certificate, which can be difficult to obtain. Without impartial observations during the registration period there is a lack of comprehensive data available regarding additional obstacles women encounter at this pre-election stage.



It should be noted that of the registered voters in Morocco for the September 4th elections, 55% were male and 45% were female.

**3.3 Parliamentary structure**

The Moroccan parliament consists of two chambers: the House of Councillors, which consists of 270 members, and House of Representatives, which consists of 325 members. The House of Representatives, in which 30 seats are reserved for women, is elected directly for a five year term. The House of Councillors is elected indirectly for a six year term by different local councils, professional chambers and wage-earners.

**4. Observations on Election Day**

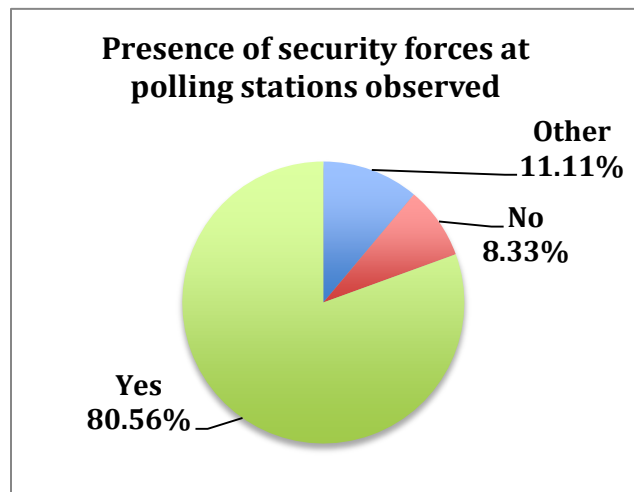
The Mission was honoured to deploy a team comprising of seven international experts and national staff to observe elections in Morocco, working in co-operation with local organisations including the CDG and the CNDH. The three GEOM teams had the opportunity to observe election proceedings in major cities such as Rabat, Casablanca, Fes, and Marrakesh, and other selected towns. Observation proceedings commenced when polling stations opened at 08:00, until they closed at 19:00. The GEOM experienced no significant problems and were warmly welcomed by staff.

#### 4.1. General Observations

In general, the three observation teams recorded an ease of access by voters to the polling stations, with waiting time generally short, resulting in a smooth voting process. Women from all age groups and social backgrounds were observed at the polling stations and were able to enter without noticeable obstacles or evident examples of discrimination. Women either arrived alone, accompanied in a group, or with family members and children. A potential obstacle presented itself when women, accompanied by their children, came to vote and received no special assistance or treatment. This however, did not deter women from casting their votes. The observation team did not record any visible incidents of pressure applied to women at, or near, the polling centres in order to influence their votes, or any other related incidents of this nature.

While these incidences formed part of a smooth voting process, observers did record a few worrying occurrences at some polling stations. They witnessed various cases in which both women and men were unable to find their names on the voter registration lists. The number of women who were unable to find their names on the voter lists was significantly higher than that of the men. Unfortunately, this resulted in the disturbance of the voting process, causing women (as well as men) to periodically leave polling stations under stressful circumstances. This is a particularly worrying occurrence as these women (and men) were thus unable to cast their votes and be part of the process of change and agency.

Lastly, despite security forces being visible and organised outside of polling centres and being seen encouraging voters to make their choice, female security personnel were underrepresented in comparison to the female/male voter ratio at the polling centres. It was also noted that female observers did not perceive any difference in behaviour towards them from security forces.



#### 4.2. Inside Polling Centres and Stations

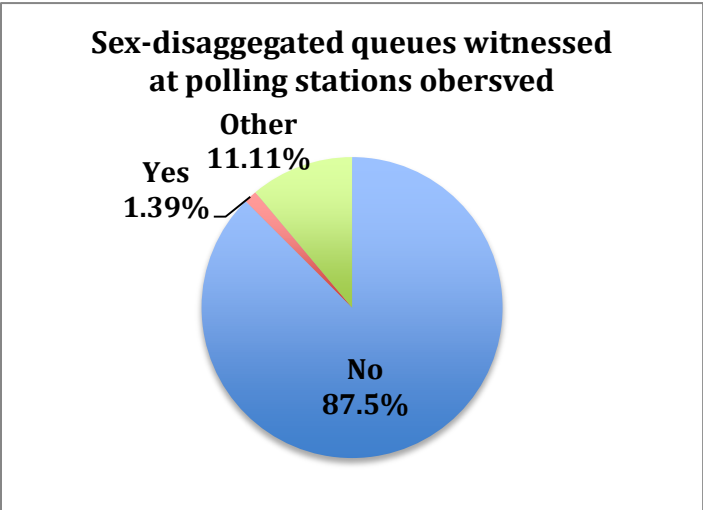
It is with satisfaction that we report a clear and consistent adherence to official procedures at polling stations in regard to the opening of the stations, the voting process, and the closing of the stations. This consistency does not however, preclude that no worrying incidents occurred. In an isolated circumstance, one polling station team observed a number of men and women, some elderly and some with children, unable to cast their votes because they were unable to verify their registration before closing of the polling station. Other polling teams did not report this finding.

Another finding from the GEOM observers was regarding the low numbers of female staff members at the polling stations. It is significant to note that women were under-represented as heads of polling stations, and similarly there were less women than men working as general staff.

Women’s participation in the election process was further highlighted when assessing efforts made by polling stations to record sex-disaggregated data. Only at a number of polling stations observers saw the recording of male and female voters, and the staff tended to do so in an informal manner. Only one observed station had a standardized form to collect sex-disaggregated data.

While long queues were rarely observed, observers did note that men and women tended to spontaneously divide into male and female queues. This led to some confusion which in turn impeded the ability of polling staff to perform their duties.

Elderly women voters were often observed receiving help accessing voting facilities. A certain number of observed polling stations were not accessible to disabled people.



### 4.3. National and International Observers

In all polling stations observed, representatives of political parties, (mainly of the dominant parties; Party for Justice and Development (PJD), Party of Authenticity (PAM) and Istiqlal Party (PI)), were present and they were predominately male. In some rare cases the representatives of political parties were giving instructions to women voters that interfered in the voting process.

It has been reported there were a total of 4000 national observers, and 76 international observers working during the election period across the country. In the polling stations observed by the organisation, national observers were seen inside the polling stations, and women were underrepresented within this group. International observers were rarely seen inside the polling stations.

## 5. Results

During the 2015 local elections, voters were tasked with electing new officials to fill 30 000 local council seats and 700 regional council seats. Together, at least 30 different parties nominated 140 000 candidates to fill those seats. Encouragingly, the percentage of people who turned out to vote increased from 52.4% in 2009 to 53.67% in 2015. Unfortunately, no data is available on the percentage of women who came out to vote compared to previous elections. The majority of seats were won by three parties: the Party for Justice and Development (PJD), which has led the government since 2011, won the majority of regional council seats 25.6%, with the Party of Authenticity (PAM) winning 19.4% of seats, and the Istiqlal Party (PI) secured 17.5% of the seats.

Women candidates won 6673 seats (21.18%) in the local council elections, which is an increase of almost double the seats that were won in the 2009 elections. As a matter of some concern, all 12

newly-elected presidents of regional associations are men, with no women being elected as heads of regional councils. Despite the encouraging number of seats won by women in the elections, they continue to face obstacles in the quest for positions of power and responsibility within the Moroccan councils, further illustrated by the fact that only 14 women were elected into the House of Councillors, as opposed to the 106 men that were elected. Encouraging and progressive changes are being made within the Moroccan socio-political landscape, but these numbers highlight the fact that the constitutionally mandated gender equality goals have not yet been met.

## **6. GEOM recommendations and Conclusion**

The participation of women and men alongside each other at polling stations is an inspiring indicator of the democratic progress in Morocco. These election observations are seen as indicators that it is vital to continue to support the involvement of women in decision-making processes and in their efforts to strengthen their capacities and knowledge with regard to the national elections 2016.

### **6.1. Recommendations for Voter Registration**

1. Although a great effort was made, registration remains a weak point, especially for women.
2. Additional staff members and/or training for voter registration officials and polling station staff is required to ensure the voter registration lists are formulated correctly and protocols for names not found on the list are successfully implemented to ensure all people who have registered and have attended polling stations can place their votes.
3. National awareness-raising campaigns need to be organised and supported to reach women, literate or illiterate, in rural and urban areas and to educate them on how to obtain identification cards.

### **6.2. Recommendations for Electoral Administration**

1. Create a gender-in-elections unit within the national election management body to oversee the inclusion of women within all aspects of electoral processes.
2. An in-depth study on registration and participation of women voters and the campaign of women candidates is absolutely necessary. A gender perspective should be considered in all statistics related to elections.
3. Implement collection of sex-disaggregated data at all polling stations with standardized forms, and evaluate the percentage by area to identify trends in female voter turnout and the determining influences.

### **6.3. Recommendations for Polling Stations**

1. Appoint a larger percentage of women as polling centre coordinators, polling station presidents and polling station staff to more closely reflect the national percentage of male and female voters.
2. Increase the number of female security personnel at polling centres (particularly in rural areas) in order to raise potential for higher female voter confidence and turnout.
3. Have designated polling staff to assist ill, pregnant and disabled women and improve their access to the stations
4. Increase the percentage of women as political party observers at polling stations, and provide additional training on guidelines for their official conduct within polling stations.
5. Recruit and train more female observers to document elections from a gender perspective.

### **6.4. Conclusion**

The mission reaffirmed Gender Concerns firm belief in the necessity of facilitating long-term gender reforms within the election process to advance women's position within the political arena and to ensure women's inclusive governance at all levels of society. Through this mission, the organisation has contributed to greater level of transparency for the elections, and was conducive in the process of establishing a democracy characteristic of equality, liberty, and inclusive governance. This mission has highlighted the progress that has been made in women's participation, and has illustrated the future paths to be taken to reach the goal of inclusive governance and electoral reform.

For the organisation, the electoral process must be viewed as a methodological tool to realise women's capacity to demand change and inclusive position within decision-making bodies at all levels. We have witnessed an increase of almost double in the amount of seats won by women in comparison with the 2009 elections, as well as a higher voter turnout number in comparison with 2009. Despite the various worrying occurrences observed at polling stations across the country, the mission is pleased to announce the increasing visibility of women at polling centres, the enactment of their agency, and administrative regulations to ensure equal access and fair voting processes on the regional and national levels.

**Annex I: GEOM Photos – Pre Election Partnership activities**





## Annex II: Map of Morocco<sup>3</sup>



<sup>3</sup> Maps of the World. 2015 <http://www.mapsofworld.com/morocco/morocco-political-map.html>

## **Annex III: Preliminary report**



### **Women Cast Their Historic Vote at Local and Regional Levels: Gender Election Observation Mission (GEOM) for Municipal and Regional Elections of 4 September in Morocco**

Preliminary Statement presented by Head of Mission Ms. Sabra Bano

5 September  
2015

Gender Concerns International congratulates the National Human Rights Council (CNDH), the Ministry of Interior, and the women and men of Morocco on the success of the historic municipal and regional elections that took place across the country on Friday 4 September. The participation of women and men alongside each other at polling stations is an inspiring indicator of democratic progress in Morocco.

Overall, electoral administration at observed polling centres was satisfactory in facilitating the vote. The presence of security forces at the centres was visible and organised to encourage voters to turnout to make their choice in the first-ever municipal and regional elections.

The Gender Election Observation Mission (GEOM) observed polling centres in major cities and selected towns in various areas of the country. The GEOM is the only international electoral observation mission that features an all-female observation team to ensure that elections are observed exclusively from a gender perspective.

At the welcome invitation of the CNDH, Gender Concerns was honoured to deploy a team of seven international experts and national staff, in co-operation with local organisations including the Alliance of Youth for Reform, the Association of Women's Creativity, and the Centre for the Rights of People. The overall aim of the GEOM Morocco 2015 is to observe and document the gender aspects of election management with the ultimate aim of supporting inclusive electoral reform.

This was a historic event for Morocco as well as for the GEOM programme in observing for the first time elections at local and regional levels around the country. It should be noted that of registered voters in Morocco for the 4 September elections, 55 percent were male and 45 percent were female.

Female leadership at local levels is key to progress on the road to democracy for all citizens. This Preliminary Statement outlines the GEOM observations and findings at polling stations observed, to help enable the free and fair participation of women in deciding the future of governance structures and leadership roles. A further evaluation of gender-inclusive electoral processes, policies and recommendations will be published in the GEOM Final Report at the conclusion of the mission.

## **Gender Election Observation Mission (GEOM) observation**

### Outside polling centres and stations

- 1) Women were observed moving freely in and out of polling centres: alone, in groups, and with family members and children. There were no visible incidents of pressure to influence women voters near the polling centres, or related incidents of this type.
- 2) Although security forces were generally present outside of polling centres observed, female security personnel were under-represented, in comparison with the female/male voter ratio at the polling centres.

### Inside polling centres and stations (*Management*)

- a) Women were poorly-represented as polling centre coordinators.
- b) Women were under-represented as heads of polling stations.
- c) Polling station staff teams were predominately male.
- 4) Waiting lines were not formed *outside* polling stations – which at times created large numbers of female voters inside the station, causing confusion and chaotic situations, undermining the authority of polling station staff.
- 5) There were proportionally more incidents observed of confusion on women's names included on voter registration lists, which created some disturbance in voting procedure, causing women to leave polling stations under sometimes stressful circumstances. At one polling station observed at closing time, a larger percentage of women – including elderly women and women with children – were waiting for verification of their registration on voting lists. Some in this group left the station without casting their vote.
- 6) Efforts were made at a number of polling stations to record the number of female and male voters, but some polling stations were not recording the sex-disaggregated data, and only one station had a standardized form to do so. Most stations that did collect sex-disaggregated data did so informally.

### *(Political agents, missions and other observations)*

- 7) Political party representatives observing inside polling stations were predominately male, and were in some cases giving instructions to women voters that interfered in the voting process.
- 8) No other international observer missions were seen inside polling stations.
- 9) Very few national observer mission representatives were seen inside polling stations; of these national observers, women were under-represented.
- 10) Elderly women voters were often observed receiving help accessing voting facilities.

## **GEOM preliminary recommendations**

- 1) Appoint a larger percentage of women as polling centre coordinators, polling station presidents and polling station staff to more closely reflect the national percentage of male and female voters.
- 2) Evaluate the need for additional training for voter registration officials and polling station staff in the formulation and implementation of voter registration lists.

- 3) Increase the percentage of women as political party observers at polling stations, and provide additional training on guidelines for their official conduct within polling stations.
- 4) Increase the number of female security personnel at polling centres (particularly in rural areas) in order to raise potential for higher female voter confidence and turnout.
- 5) Create a gender-in-elections unit within the national election management body to oversee inclusion of women within all aspects of electoral processes.
- 6) Implement collection of sex-disaggregated data at all polling stations with standardized forms, and evaluate the percentage by area to identify trends in female voter turnout and the determining influences.
- 7) Further increase national awareness-raising campaigns – including in rural areas and for illiterate women – for the need of identification cards to vote.
- 8) The composition of the newly-elected municipal and regional governments should grant Moroccan women the place they merit in governance and leadership roles.

### **More about Gender Concerns**

Gender Concerns International supports women worldwide in claiming their role as “agents of change”. Currently, the organisation – based in The Hague, the Netherlands – is active in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Middle East-North Africa region. Following the success of the 2011 Morocco national election observation mission, a Gender Election Observation Mission has observed Moroccan elections from a gender perspective for a second consecutive time.

As an organisation, Gender Concerns International has extensive international experience with GEOM in countries including Tunisia (2014 and 2011), Pakistan (2013 and 2008) and Libya (2012). A firm foundation of positive interaction and support of national election commissions in these countries has been built through previous missions to be able to successfully conduct the 2015 mission in Morocco.

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For further details and statistics on observations Contact Matt Luna, Mission Outreach and Management Gender Concerns International; [matt@genderconcerns.org](mailto:matt@genderconcerns.org)