

**SAFEGUARDING ELECTORAL INTEGRITY IN THE
DIGITAL AGE:
STRATEGIES FOR COMBATTING DIGITAL
DISINFORMATION**

AN AFRICAN CONFERENCE

**CLOSING REMARKS BY
CHAIRPERSON OF THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION
MR GLEN MASHININI**

**CAPE TOWN INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTRE
5 MARCH 2020**

SUMMATION

- Thank you Programme Director Masego Sheburi
- Ladies and gentlemen
- Distinguished guests
- We have come to the conclusion of our programme
- On behalf of the Electoral Commission let me thank all of you for making this conference so stimulating, inspiring and thought-provoking
- Over the past few days we have discussed, debated and deliberated on one of the most pressing and persistent challenges facing electoral democracies the world over:
 - How best to protect and maintain the integrity of elections in the face of both opportunities and threats from social media

EMERGING CONSENSUS

- With your inputs we have considered and discussed the pros and cons of a variety of potential approaches to the challenge of social media and especially disinformation and deliberate manipulation of voters
- What has clearly emerged is that:
 1. Our solutions must be broad-based and inclusive of the full ambit of stakeholders including:
 - Election management bodies
 - Political parties and candidates
 - Civil society organisations
 - The media
 - Social media platforms and technology companies
 - Regulatory authorities
 - And the voters themselves

KEY AREAS OF CONSENSUS

2. While inclusivity is vital, this process must be led and driven by electoral management bodies who ultimately carry the responsibility of protecting the integrity of elections
3. That not all countries and electoral management bodies are at the same level of capacity and experience so we need to work together to support each other on the continent to build our capacities to deal with this new dimension in electoral democracy
4. That, as with most things in life, there is no single, magical solution to the challenges posed by social media. Rather it will take a variety of approaches and actions

SUMMATION

- Ladies and gentlemen
- This conference is only the beginning of a long journey we must all undertake to safeguard the hard-won democratic gains in our countries and our continent
- But every journey begins with a first step
- This conference is a huge step forward in reaching broad consensus on where we want to go and how best to get there
- We have planted the seeds which will guide our individual and collective responses and have charted a course for us all to follow at our own pace

SUMMATION

- The father of South Africa's democracy Mr Nelson Mandela in his autobiography "*The Long Walk to Freedom*" reminds us that journeys are not always easy
- He wrote:

“After climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb.”
- We have summited the first hill...and beyond lie many more hills to climb in defending and deepening democracy across our continent and around the world
- These include taking forward the seed we have planted to ensure it grows and flourishes into some kind of continental structure and plan of action
- But today we can congratulate each other on this first important achievement
- Tomorrow we begin our climb of the next hill!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- In conclusion ladies and gentlemen
- Allow me on behalf of the Electoral Commission to extend our heartfelt thanks and gratitude to all those who have made this conference such a success
- Thank you to our Conference Programme Director Mr Sy Mamabolo, the Chief Electoral Officer of the IEC, for managing the programme with such efficiency and productivity
- To my fellow Commissioners from the Electoral Commission of South Africa:
 - Vice Chairperson Janet Love
 - Judge Dhaya Pillay
 - Dr Nomsa Masuku and
 - Mr Mosotho Moepya
- Thank you for your inputs and guidance in planning and hosting this conference and for moderating the sessions with insight and clarity

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- To our partners the United Nations Development Programme and Dr Ayodele Odusola, Resident Representative, our immense gratitude for the collaboration and support in arranging and hosting this conference
- Thanks to the African Union and Dr Khebele Matlosa for your support and assistance in promoting the conference and helping to ensure such a strong turnout
- On behalf of the Electoral Commission let me express our thanks and appreciation to all the conference speakers, panellists and rapporteurs for taking the time and making the long journey for many of you to provide the knowledge and expertise in what are new and unfamiliar subjects for many of us

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS CONT

- To those behind the scenes –from the Electoral Commission’s national and provincial offices as well as the UNDP – who have arranged the travel, transfers, meals, excursion and all other services and facilities: our immense gratitude and thanks
- You have made the entire experience a memorable one for all the right reasons!
- To the translators we say: “Thank you! Merci! Obrigado! Shukraan!”

CONCLUSION

- Finally, ladies and gentlemen
- Our deepest appreciation and thanks to the conference delegates and attendees from electoral management bodies, from political parties, from civil society, from the media and other stakeholders for your active participation and contributions
- The success of this conference is your success
- It is our hope that one day not too long from now we will look back at Cape Town in March 2020 as a turning point in the evolution of electoral democracy and say: “I was there when we charted a course for Africa and the world to manage social media and elections”
- I wish you safe travels home and all the best for the future of electoral democracy in your countries
- Thank you