

Conakry, Guinea, June 9 (Infosplusgabon) - A delegation of the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) began talks on Friday with the leadership of Guinea's Electoral Commission, CENI, on wide-ranging issues, including capacity strengthening, technical and logistics support to the electoral body, and the implementation of recommendations by the ECOWAS observation mission to the country's last general elections in 2015.

The team, led by Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, ECONEC governing board President and Chair of Nigeria's Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), is on a Post-election follow-up Mission (PEFM), part of an assessment and early warning strategy instituted by ECOWAS to track and address risk factors that could negatively impact the credibility and peaceful conduct of elections in member States.

Guinea holds its national parliamentary vote in January 2019, to be followed by a crucial presidential election in 2020. There are also unresolved issues from the country's last February municipal elections, whose results are being contested by some political actors.

At two separate meetings with CENI, involving the Commission's President Barr Amadou Salif Kebe, Vice President Bakary Mansare, and Commissioners in charge of Operations and Training, the officials commended ECOWAS and ECONEC for their contributions to the consolidation of democracy through support for credible elections in the region.

They also applauded the excellent bilateral relations between Nigeria and Guinea and the sustained support to CENI by INEC.

In his remarks, Prof Yakubu explained that ECONEC and INEC were building bridges for peer-learning and mutually beneficial cooperation among election management bodies in order to consolidate best practices in the conduct of credible and peaceful elections in the ECOWAS region.

Noting that all 15 ECOWAS member States were now democracies, he said: “we should ensure that elections do not lead to conflicts by using the instrumentality of ECONEC to ensure peaceful elections, instead of having to deploy ECOMOG (the regional peace keeping force), because of disputed elections.”

The ECONEC president urged CENI and other political stakeholders in Guinea to ensure the implementation of the recommendations by the ECOWAS election observation mission (EOM), and also to be specific on the areas of assistance required to ensure an improvement in the conduct of future elections in the country.

Some of the EOM’s recommendations include the need for legal and political reforms to strengthen the technical and professional capacity of CENI to make it more transparent and

truly independent, and the strengthening of dialogue among political actors to ensure peaceful socio-political climate.

PEFM is one of the innovations to ECOWAS' election assessment methodology, which enables cycle-wide engagement with the electoral process in member States.

The main objective is to assess measures being taken by Member State actors to implement the recommendations of EOMs and identify possible areas of support required to enable full implementation of the recommendations ahead of the next electoral cycle.

During their four-day stay in Conakry, the Prof Yakubu-led delegation, which includes Prof Emmanuel Tiando, ECONEC first vice president and Chair of Benin Republic's Electoral Commission, ECONEC Secretariat and INEC officials, will also meet with other political stakeholders in Guinea including, political parties; MPs, Civil Society Organisations and other institutions mentioned in the EOM's recommendations.

The Mission, which is supported by the German International Development Agency, GIZ, Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA), and INEC, is expected to generate a report identifying challenges and areas of support required to ensure effective implementation of recommendations by the EOM. This will be submitted to the ECOWAS authorities, and serve as basis for planning and adjusting ECOWAS Electoral Assistance Division's future electoral support.

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