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Africa News

October 18, 2007 Thursday

## Togo; Observers Sanction Elections While Opposition Cries Foul

BYLINE: UN Integrated Regional Information Networks

LENGTH: 357 words

Crucial parliamentary elections in Togo, which donors said they would use as a benchmark for whether the country is ready to start receiving development aid again, were flawed according to opposition leaders but monitor groups declared them free and fair.

"Apart from some deficiencies," the elections were "free, fair and transparent," the regional organisation, the Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS), which mobilised 100 monitors to scrutinise the polls, said in a report.

The national election commission in Togo announced late on 18 October that the ruling party had won a majority of at least 49 of 81 contested seats.

The main opposition party, the Union des Forces de Changement (UFC), which won 21 seats, challenged the results. In a statement, it alleged that the voting process had been "compromised" as ballot boxes were tampered with, fake election cards had been distributed before the poll, and some voting papers had been destroyed.

Electoral officials said the turnout for the poll was 95 percent. The ECOWAS report concurred: "In the capital Lome and generally everywhere in the country, there was a strong participation."

Extensive flooding in Togo in September which displaced over 100,000 people had receded before the elections started. "The waters had diminished so we could get the voting materials in and we made sure to put the voting stations in very accessible places," said Edmond Lalle, Minister of Security.

The European Union, which was once Togo's biggest foreign donor, cut its ties with the country in 1993 because of Togo's "democratic deficit". In 2005, the country's first ever presidential election descended into violence over a contested result.

But the EU observers of the current poll have said that it was conducted in "transparent" conditions, although they have not yet been released their report.

A transparent and democratic legislative election "could lead to the full resumption of EU's cooperation with Togo," the acting head of the EU delegation in Togo, Joao Melo de Sampaio, told IRIN before the election.

[ This report does not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations ]

LOAD-DATE: October 18, 2007

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

**PUBLICATION-TYPE:** Newsletter