

Gambia: Commonwealth Elections Assessment Team

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An advanced Commonwealth Elections Assessment Team is currently in The Gambia and has hold meetings with diverse stakeholders and members of civil society organizations. The team is said to be here ahead of the forthcoming presidential elections for which the institution pans to send a contingent of observers.

The team, which is headed Dr. Victor Pungong who is the Deputy. Director of the Commonwealth's Political Affairs Division and heads its Good Offices Section. The IEC which says the team is here upon its invitation has assured Dr. Pungong and his colleagues of "well managed . efficient, free and fair process" in spite of the many problems that have recently beset the electoral commission. The man who headed the commission only several weeks ago, was dismissed, accused of corruption, arrested and detained together with two senior colleagues. Though Mr. Njie was released after being detained twice over the past three weeks, he is still compelled to report to the NIA.

The dismissals followed a supplementary registration exercise that was mired with accusations of impartiality and inefficiency. On Tuesday, 22nd August, Dr. Pungong and his team had the occasion to meet with members of the National Security Council, a weekly club of chiefs of the various heads of security units who meet under the chairpersonship of Vice President Aja Istaou Njie Saidu.

Speaking to the press, shortly after their audience with the members of the NSC, Dr Pungong said the courtesy call is meant to deliberate on the preparations for the deployment of the Commonwealth Election Observers, noting that it's often practiced by his organization. "It is good to have some contact with the security personnel, and other key partners. The Gambia is a good friend of the Commonwealth and a very important member," he said.. "Commonwealth is one of the partners of The Gambia. It has in the past provided technical assistance to the IEC and I think they are doing a good job. Everyone is in a different way trying to help the IEC. We are involved in other areas and other partners are involved in some other areas," he added. Dr Pungong was accompanied to the meeting by Ms Sabhita K Raju, Political Affairs Officer at the Political Affairs Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat.