

**COMMONWEALTH OBSERVER GROUP**

**BOUGAINVILLE REFERENDUM**

**PAPUA NEW GUINEA**

**Arrival Statement by Chair**

H.E. Anote Tong, Former President of the Republic of Kiribati

22 November 2019, Buka, Autonomous Region of Bougainville,

Papua New Guinea

We are honoured to have been requested by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC, to observe the Bougainville Referendum on the future political status of Bougainville, scheduled from 23 November, at the invitation of the Government of Papua New Guinea.

We convened in Port Moresby on 20 November 2019 and will be present in Bougainville until the announcement of results. Members of our Group are drawn from various Commonwealth regions, with backgrounds ranging from the political, electoral, civil society and human rights as well as legal fields.

Over the past two days, we received briefings from relevant stakeholders including the Bougainville Referendum Commission and members of the international community. We will be meeting local stakeholders in Bougainville from today.

We will consider the various factors impinging on the credibility of the referendum process as a whole, and report on whether it has been conducted according to the national referendum-related legislation and relevant regional, Commonwealth, including its Charter, and other international commitments.

As independent observers, we will remain objective and impartial in discharging these duties. The Group's assessment will be its own and not that of any Commonwealth member country.

Today, our observers are deploying to Buka, Arawa and Buin. We will observe the opening of the polls, voting, counting of votes and the management of results before our departure from Bougainville.

We will issue a statement of our preliminary findings ahead of our departure.

Our final report will be submitted to the Commonwealth Secretary-General and will be made available to the public afterwards.

On behalf of my fellow Observer Group members, I wish the people of Bougainville well as they exercise their right to vote from tomorrow, 23 November 2019.

**The Commonwealth Observer Group is composed of:**

H.E. Mr Anote Tong, Former President of the Republic of Kiribati (Chairperson)

Ms Lorna Simon, Supervisor of Elections, Antigua & Barbuda

Ms Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, Board Chair: Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) & Co-chair Board of Global Fund for Women, Fiji

Mr Graham Leung, Legal Adviser, Fiji

The Commonwealth Observer Group is supported by the following Commonwealth Secretariat Support Team:

Mr Martin Kasirye, Head, Electoral Support Section, Governance & Peace Directorate  
*(Staff Team Leader)*

Ms Angela Thomas, Political Officer, Governance & Peace Directorate

Ms Zippy Ojago, Executive Officer (Electoral Support), Governance & Peace Directorate