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SAHARAN AFRICA: WHO DOES
LOOK AFTER THE OBSERVERS?**

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**THE ELECTORAL MISSIONS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: WHO DOES
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Abstract:

In sub-Saharan Africa, international missions deployed to guarantee elections credibility have a very important role in continental institutional development. Recent controversies concern recent elections, questioning the final verdict of international observers, and many voices have risen in the continent claiming for a full revision of electoral mission tasks and performance, in order to strengthen their position in the institutional development of those countries.

Keywords:

Sub-Saharan Africa, elections, international observers.

Throughout the year 2013, a lavish year in electoral contests over the African region from the arid Sahel to the South, the debate in relation to the participation of observers involved in international missions to ensure the strictest and most possible respect to political rights in the elections, to report cases of fraud or electoral fiddle when registering votes during the election day or the subsequent counting of ballots, has been intensified. In all these countries, the European Union has significantly increased its presence as an observer¹ with the African Union, which channels their participation through AUEOM (African Union Electoral Short Term Missions). The latest announced missions will deploy in Rwanda, Guinea, Cameroon and Swaziland². Other regional organizations are also increasing their role in these monitoring tasks, such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC)³. This organization has sparked a significant debate⁴ after issuing an opinion in which the re-election of the aging President Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe, for another term of five years, was described as fair and credible.

Provided that the international community, whether headed by a country or by a multilateral organization, is deployed anywhere in Africa, its performance is a subject of controversy and discussion. Regarding the popular consultations, the arrival of these representatives, neutral and unaffiliated to the interests that are put at stake, is welcomed by those who want a neat feedback, without incidents or violence. Especially in those countries threatened by civil conflicts, where a disagreement related to the process or the results of the polls may lead to open warfare. While it is clear that the avoidance of widespread violence after elections is a step forward, we cannot forget that, sometimes, abuses and human rights violations are being consented in a risky concession of the international community. It is likely that if the causes and the mechanisms that generate violence remain anchored to a society, an inevitable crisis will simply being postponed.

Therefore, it is necessary for supervision to go beyond the populous capital limits, official receptions and high-level meetings behind, in order to cover the most remote areas, where daily interaction is difficult and tense, and it is also important not to neglect especially vulnerable groups such as refugees or internally displaced persons. Examples of sectors that can represent a significant percentage of the census and thus be decisive in choosing assemblies and heads of state.

In Africa, several presidents and political leaders have spoken out strongly against the presence of electoral missions sent from other continents. They have questioned the moral

¹ Consult http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/human-rights/election_observation_missions/ Con acceso el 14 de septiembre de 2013

² Consult <http://pa.au.int/en/content/african-union-deploys-electoral-observations-missions-rwanda-swaziland-guinea-and-cameroon>. Con acceso el 17 de septiembre de 2013

³ Consult <http://sadc-esn.org> Date of last acces 15th September 2013

⁴ Consult <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/03/zimbabwe-morgan-tsvangirai>

integrity of those supervisors, denouncing the weakening for national sovereignty and the country's institutions observed, and the low consideration to African experts in this field. Those were some of the arguments made by Robert Mugabe to prohibit the entry of observers in Zimbabwe⁵. During the last presidential elections on the 1st August 1 he did not admit the presence of Nigerian president Obasanjo, who was part of the delegation sent by the AU, either. In the meanwhile, the effect of international treaties is remembered from the outside. It is important to add too the difficulty of agreeing a common position in African organizations when facing elections in countries suffering a crisis, and the democratic deficiencies affecting countries responsible for issuing the verdict. Group in which we can include, of course, the Western countries.

Among the most turbulent countries, where elections add risks to the fragile social and political stability, we can highlight Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Côte d'Ivoire and Kenya⁶.

In any case election monitoring, provided that it depends on other actors, will continue to generate discussion.

Indeed, contrary reactions to international monitoring are leading many analysts and researchers to submit its activity for discussion, beyond the recurring press release which rarely reflects the complex circumstances in which they operate, and that usually suggest a number of details that may have been deepened.

In this regard, several initiatives have been developed, driven by various research institutes and other academic institutions, in order to consolidate a reliable model of tasks supervision carried out by international observers. One of the most active is the one directed by Judith Kelley, at Duke University in the U.S. state of North Carolina⁷. Her research has been collected in the volume entitled *Monitoring Democracies*, published in 2012⁸. In this work, the author makes a number of recommendations to governments and multilateral organizations so they can improve the effectiveness of electoral missions.

Another project is the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa⁹.

Pero, sobre todo, para que prevalezcan los derechos individuales y las libertades políticas en el desarrollo de todas las fases comprendidas en un proceso electoral; de tal forma que los ciudadanos no sean perseguidos ni violentados por defender sus opiniones políticas. Ni que

⁵ Consult <http://blogs.cfr.org/campbell/2013/04/17/zimbabwe-ban-on-eu-and-u-s-election-observers-undermines-international-confidence/> Date of last acces 16th September 2013

⁶ Consult <http://www.issafrica.org/events/a-review-of-kenyas-2013-elections> Date of last acces 15th September 2013

⁷ Consult <http://sites.duke.edu/kelley/> Date of last acces 12nd September 2013

⁸ More information at <http://sites.duke.edu/kelley/book/>

⁹ More information at their web page, <http://eisa.org.za> Date of last acces 15th September 2013

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los candidatos sufran menoscabo alguno en el ejercicio de sus derechos como representantes de la voluntad popular.

The controversy that has arisen around some of the elections taking place this year in Africa, should be an incentive for all parties involved to try to improve and strengthen the functions and role of international observers. The aim of that is to finish with suspicions of pusillanimous attitudes or coexistence or tolerance to some of the candidates who are vying for power. But, above all of the goals, we find that individual rights and political freedoms prevail in the development of all the steps involved in elections, so that citizens are not persecuted or busted for defending their political opinions; we don't want candidates suffering any impairment in the exercise of their rights as representatives of the popular will.

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