



March 24, 2014

## **Election Working Group Preliminary Statement on the Fourth Phase of Upazila Elections Held on March 23, 2014**

### **SCOPE OF OBSERVATION**

In order to observe the fourth phase of the Upazila Elections held on March 23<sup>rd</sup> 2014, the Election Working Group (EWG) deployed 680 observers in 680 polling stations across 23 upazilas (out of 91 upazilas where polls were held). Within each upazila, the location of observers in polling stations were assigned using a random sampling technique from the complete list of polling stations prepared and gazetted by the Election Commission Bangladesh (ECB). In each upazila, a statistically significant number of observers were deployed. All observers received a full day's training, with many observers having previous experience in observation activities. EWG's election day observation activities were comprehensive, covering: (i) preparation and opening of the polling stations; (ii) voting operations and procedures; (iii) closing and counting; and (iv) voting environment inside the polling stations.

### **FINDINGS**

EWG found Election Day to be marred by a significant level of electoral violations and associated violence. Despite adequate polling operations in many of the stations observed, the integrity of the process overall was undermined by the scale of violations observed. The mean average voter turnout figure in polling stations observed was 66.5%.

#### ***Opening of polling stations***

EWG observed a high level of preparedness on Election Day with almost all polling stations equipped with the necessary materials (99%) and found ready for voting at 8.00 am (96%). Security forces were deployed at all observed polling stations. Proper processes were followed in almost all stations with the demonstration of empty ballot boxes (99%) and the fixing of security locks on the ballot boxes (99%). At the opening of polls, there was moderate queuing of voters with between 1-20 voters waiting in 54% of stations and 13% recording a queue of more

#### **ABOUT EWG**

The Election Working Group (EWG) is a non-partisan network of 29 leading civil society organizations in Bangladesh that was formed in 2006 with the shared goal of enhancing transparency and accountability of elections and other democratic processes.

EWG is governed by a strict code of conduct to carry out comprehensive election observation throughout the country. Since its establishment, EWG has observed elections at the national, City Corporation and local levels, as well as conducting advocacy activities on election-related issues.

As part of its core mandate, EWG has been observing each phase of the 2014 Upazila Elections.

than 40 voters.

### ***Voting operations & violations***

EWG observers found voting operations by officials were carried out proficiently in the majority of stations, with 96% of polling personnel carrying out their work in a knowledgeable manner. The majority of stations had been laid out adequately to aid efficient voting (89%), however EWG did receive 90 reports of accessibility difficulties for disabled voters due to the station location and setup. Female polling personal were found to be present in 78.65% of female polling booths.

Reports of electoral violence and polling violations were significant throughout the day. The table below outlines the recorded violations

<b>Violations</b>	<b>No. of Reports</b>	<b>No. of Upazilas Reporting</b>
Suspected fraud	184	16 of 23
Violent incident within station	122	19 of 23
Intimidation of voters	92	19 of 23
Violation of campaign law	64	17 of 23
Citizen denied ability to vote by other actors	17	9 of 23
Polling station declared closed	26	11 of 23
Polling agents removed from station	70	10 of 23
Arrest within station	14	10 of 23
EWG observer not allowed to observe counting procedure	35	16 of 23

To further understand the seriousness and brazen nature of the above listed violations, EWG has documented several reported cases below. Where possible, the EWG secretariat has sought confirmation of the reported violations by speaking with either an attending electoral official, district electoral official or other attending representatives.

- In Pirojpur Sadar Upazila, despite being removed from 18 polling stations, EWG observers were still able to observe and document supporters of a single candidate systematically undertaking ballot stuffing, stamping multiple ballot papers and placing them into the ballot boxes. In another polling station in the same upazila, a child of about 9-10 years of age was observed casting 13 votes for a single candidate.
- In a polling station in Anowara Upazila, an EWG observer was told to leave the polling station by the Presiding Officer as he anticipated violence in the polling station. After leaving the station, the observer was still able to view several people entering the station and stamping a significant number of ballot papers.
- In a polling station in Kolaroa Upazila, a vice chairman candidate himself stamped multiple ballot papers in front of the EWG observer and electoral officials.

- In two polling stations in Jessore Sadar Upazila voting operation were ended at around 2 pm, with voters arriving after 2 pm told that their votes had already been cast.

The above violations are representative of many violations reported, and highlight the level of fraudulent practice undertaken with the intent to alter the outcome of the vote in multiple upazilas, in some cases systematically. Further, in each case these activities took place with disregard to the attendance of electoral officials, accredited election observers, candidate representatives and security forces.

### ***Counting & Closing***

The counting and closing procedures were found to be carried out in a professional manner in the majority of centres. Protests or objections by candidate agents were recorded in 9.72% of stations, and the hanging of poll results as required by law was not undertaken in 13.86% of stations. Counting of votes was made difficult in some stations due to violations that had occurred earlier in the day.

### **OBSERVER INCIDENTS**

In a minority number of cases, EWG continues to find some Presiding Officers preventing accredited observers from entering stations and carrying out their duties. In accordance with electoral law, Presiding Officers do not have the authority to bar the entry of accredited observers. In a polling station in Batighata, despite showing accreditation, an observer was not allowed to enter into the polling station and was forcibly removed by the police on the orders of the Presiding Officer. In a polling station in Anowara Upazila, an EWG observer along with the Presiding Officer was locked in a room by a group of men and held against their will for several hours. In another polling station in the same upazila, an observer was verbally threatened not to report incidences of fraud that were taking place. In Pirojpur Sadar Upazila, presiding officers removed 18 observers from polling stations at the same time of day, suggesting some level of coordination took place.

**Md. Abdul Alim**

Director

**THIS IS A PRELIMINARY STATEMENT. A FULL REPORT DETAILING OBSERVATION ACTIVITIES WILL BE PROVIDED AT A LATER DATE.**