

GECOM Considering the Possible Introduction of Automatic Ballot Scan and Tabulation System for Future Elections

In recognition of the need to tabulate, certify and announce accurate results of elections in a timelier manner, the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) is exploring the possibility of embarking on a pilot project in which automatic scanning and tabulation machines could be used in a future election.

Accordingly, a team of Representatives of the DELIAN Project, an independent, non-profit organization registered in Canada, and the United States of America, visited GECOM on Monday, January 13, 2014, and conducted a demonstration on the use of automatic ballot scan and tabulation technology.

The DELIAN team comprised Mr. Jean-Pierre Kingsley, erstwhile Chief Executive Officer of the International Foundation of electoral systems and currently Chairman of the DELIAN's Advisory Board, who served as the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada from 1997 to 2010; Mr. John Hollins, Chairman of the DELIAN Board of Directors, who was Chief Electoral Officer for the Province of Ontario from 2001 to 2008, and Mr. Allan Best, Managing Director.

The DELIAN Project was created in 2011 as a philanthropic entity by the Canadian elections technology firm Dominion Voting Systems (DVS). The DELIAN Project procures and donates electoral technology to emerging and growing democracies. DELIAN is a signatory to the United Nations Global Compact, and recently joined the Clinton Global Initiative.

At the demonstration, it was pointed out that the DELIAN Project could donate up to 25 paper-based, automatic ballot scan and tabulation machines to Guyana for a future election. Each machine can handle roughly 1,000 – 1,250 voters on a typical polling day. The automatic ballot scan and tabulation system could be deployed on a pilot basis at up to 25 polling stations at a future election, as selected by GECOM.

The advantage of a paper-based, automatic ballot scan and tabulation system solution is that results are tabulated (counted) as they are sent in at the close of the polls, resulting in the ability

to announce results immediately, while still maintaining the comfort of a “paper trail” should a physical re-count be required.

The automatic ballot scan and tabulation systems are paper-based and allow for electronic, automatic tabulation of results. They are a form of document ballot voting systems, meaning that there is a tangible record of the voter’s intent even as a voter still marks a traditional paper ballot.

The procedure for using the automatic ballot scan and tabulation system involves (i) the voter simply using pen and paper to mark his/her intent on the ballot, and (ii) the voter’s ballot paper being confidentially scanned and dropped into a sealed ballot box. At the close of polls, results are tabulated and the statement of poll is printed and shared with polling station officials, and then sent to the Returning Officer through a secure, electronic medium. In the case of an unclear mark, the ballot scan and tabulation machine returns the ballot to the voter for review and correction, if desired. Finally, the Returning Officer electronically collates and tabulates poll results received from the multiple machines to rapidly and accurately produce consolidated poll results. Of importance, it must be noted that the ballot paper can be used to complete an audit trail if a manual recount becomes necessary.

During their three-day visit to Guyana, the DELIAN Project Representatives also met with the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, A Partnership for National Unity and the Alliance For Change. They also visited Leguan and Wakenaam Islands to get a feel of the type of terrain in which the machines could be put to use in any pilot project.

Guyana’s election laws do not currently provide for the use of electronic voting systems. Hence, the laws would have to be amended accordingly, should there be agreement between GECOM and the *bona fide* Political Parties pertaining to any introduction of the automatic ballot scan and tabulation systems in Guyana.

Witnessing the demonstration which was conducted in the GECOM Boardroom were Dr. Steve Surujbally, Chairman of GECOM, Commissioners Ms. Sandra Jones and Mr. Arun Mangar, Mr.

Calvin Benn – Chief Election Officer (ag), Mr. Keith Lowenfield – Deputy Chief Election Officer (ag), and technical staff from the Commission’s IT Division.

Subsequent to its visit to Guyana, the DELIAN Project Team conducted another demonstration to a wider audience during the 7th Annual General Meeting of the Association of Caribbean Electoral Organisations (ACEO), which was held under the Chairmanship of Dr. Surujbally in Paramaribo, Suriname on January 16-17, 2014.