



EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING SEMINAR ON ELECTORAL INTEGRITY AND ADVOCACY

Salutations:

1. The European Union Ambassador to Kenya, Her Excellency, Ms Henriette Geiger;
2. Mr. Tawanda Chimhini -Expert Democracy & Elections under the Democracy Elections Unit of AU
3. Chairperson of the AfEONet (and WEON), the Rev James Lahai;
4. Coordinators of E-HORN, ESN/SA?
5. All our invited guests, both local and international,

Good morning to you, and welcome to this AfEONet Inaugural Experiential Learning Seminar (ELS) on electoral integrity and advocacy being convened here today through the financial support of European Delegation and European Partnership for Democracy (EPD). I am delighted to address the whole Africa in this room! What a big honor, ladies and gentlemen.

Your Excellency, this meeting comes at the backdrop of a number of elections held in Africa last year. Indeed, 2024 was a major election year in Africa where at beginning of the year, 17 African countries were scheduled to hold presidential/general elections. With 4 postponed elections in Burkina Faso, Mali, South Sudan and Guinea-Bissau, 13 countries held elections in 2024, the last one being Ghana on 7 December.

Your Excellency, ladies and gentlemen, as you many already know, Africa's democratic trajectory has been a mix of progress, setbacks, and resilience. The East and HORN of Africa for instance The East and Horn of Africa region faces several significant obstacles to holding free and fair elections. These challenges include: Political and Institutional Weaknesses; Security Challenges; Electoral Malpractices & Lack of Transparency; Ethnic & Sectarian Divisions; Restrictions on Opposition & Media; External Interference; Economic Constraints

Socrates' claim, in the Apology, that the “**unexamined life is not worth living**” provides a basis for this meeting. As election observers and monitors, this meeting therefore provides us with the opportunity to reflect on key issues around electoral integrity and advocacy while at the same time, provides us with the opportunity to transfer lessons learnt/good practices from these electoral processes to countries facing elections this year. In our region of E-HORN, elections are scheduled to take place in Burundi (May,2025), Tanzania (October 2025) and Uganda (Jan, 2026).

Excellency, and fellow observers, free and fair elections in the region require evidence based election observation, institutional reforms, strengthened electoral bodies, security improvements, and greater international oversight. Without addressing these obstacles, democratic progress remains fragile.

While some countries have upheld democratic principles, others have the resurgence of coups; decline of civic Space and threats to press freedom, electoral violence and militarization of the ballot, economic and security challenges as well inadequate interventions by RECs which continue to make us ask serious questions on the place of democratic elections in our continent. Citizens are slowly but surely are beginning to distrust electoral processes and institutions of democracy as a result!

It is my firm hope that these 2 days of reflection here in Nairobi, will enhance our effectiveness as citizen election observers and networks, better equip us to address systematic challenges that election observers and monitors face

I thank you for this chance to speak before you and I am looking forward to fruitful and solution oriented discussions.

Asante Sana and Karibuni sana!

DR SARAH BIREETE, CHAIRPERSON E-HORN.

25th March 2025, Nairobi.