

All systems go for Elections 2014

Here is an overview of the preparations and other matters surrounding tomorrow's elections.



The country's 22,263 voting stations, writes Nthambeleni Gabara, will open on schedule at 7am tomorrow in anticipation of 25.39 million voters, who have registered to vote, says IEC Chairperson Advocate Pansy Tlakula.

"You can now report to the people of South Africa and registered voters that we are ready to deliver yet another free and fair election, and we will do so efficiently," she told reporters yesterday.

She was briefing reporters at the Independent Electoral Commission's (IEC) first press conference for the 2014 General Elections at the Results Operations Centre in Pretoria.

"We are ready to make them proud again and follow in the glorious tradition of twenty years of democracy, it is now up to the voters to make their choice, and we appeal to all voters to respect the rights of others to choose a political party of their choice.

"We appeal to political parties to respect our process and to work with our officials and security to ensure peaceful and smooth elections."

Sending a special message to voters, Tlakula said: "Our future as a country is in your hands, this is your country, this is your moment, vote and vote wisely".

Voting stations

She said a total of 20,736 voting stations are permanent venues, while 1,495 are located at temporary venues where tents will normally be required.

Tlakula said 14,458 voting stations are located in schools, 1,591 are located in places of worship, 255 at tribal authority sites, while a further 77 are located in clinics and hospitals.

There are also 32 mobile voting stations, which are in far-flung voting districts, where a vehicle moves between pre-determined stopping points to meet voters.

According to Tlakula, all materials have been distributed to local warehouses including 62,892,200 ballot papers -- 31,411,100 national and 31,491,100 provincial.

She said 211,032 temporary positions have been filled and training done for voting station staff.

"Additionally some 4,563 area managers have been appointed to oversee voting activities within district areas. Along with permanent IEC staff, this brings to approximately 218,000 staff working on the elections," she said.

Security tightened in run up to elections

Security force deployments will over the next two days intensify to ensure that the 2014 general election takes place peacefully and safely.

"We are satisfied that the environment remains stable and conducive to free and fair elections taking place," said police spokesperson Solomon Makgale.

He said the all partners in the National Joint Operational and Intelligence Structure (Natjoints) are in close cooperation with the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) as South Africans prepare to vote on Wednesday in the fifth democratic elections.

Makgale said police officials will be deployed at all 22,363 voting stations across the country.

"We remind voters that voting stations are firearm-free zones and no firearm should be taken to a voting station," he said.

The work of Natjoints is guided by daily risk assessments by the Intelligence Coordinating Committee at the National Joint Operational Centre.

This risk assessment guides the tactical deployment of law enforcement officers and the security forces.

Makgale said in certain areas, where community protests are taking place, it has been necessary to conduct operations aimed at stabilising the area prior to Election Day.

"In Marikana in Rustenburg, North West, combined cordon-and-search operations have been on-going over this past weekend, following recent looting in the vicinity," Makgale said.

The South African Police Service (SAPS) National Intervention Unit and the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) have been working jointly with local SAPS units. The Hawks and the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation will also ensure dedicated investigative capacity and docket management for criminal matters related to the elections.

On Sunday, 63 dangerous weapons were seized in Freedom Park and 72 at Karee Hostel in Marikana, while 160kg of dagga was also seized.

Four individuals were arrested after goods stolen during the looting were found on their premises.

There have also been reported tensions in Sterkspruit in the Eastern Cape, which has also been identified as the one of the country's election hotspots.

In the early hours of Monday morning, a room at Ekuzoleni Senior Primary School, which is one of the IEC's polling stations, was set alight.

Despite this, voting at the school continued successfully as planned. South Africans who had applied for special votes went to the polls on Monday. Special votes will continue until 5pm today.

The IEC has expressed confidence in how the special voting process has progressed.

SA welcomes international election observer missions

Government has welcomed the various international election observer missions in the country ahead of the 2014 National and Provincial Elections, scheduled for tomorrow.

The international election observers are spread across all nine provinces to assess the conduct of the South African electoral process and monitor compliance with international standards.

"The practice of foreign countries and international organisations monitoring elections is accepted as one of the ways in which the international community can monitor and promote compliance with democratic values, principles and practices," said International Relations and Cooperation spokesperson Clayson Monyela.

According to Monyela, these missions include those dispatched by the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the African Union (AU) and the Commonwealth.

The United Nations (UN) has also been invited to send an election observer mission in addition to ambassadors and High Commissioners, who have been invited by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) to visit polling stations throughout the country.

Monyela said this was not necessarily a standard international practice.

"It's not all countries that extend this courtesy to the Diplomatic Corps. In fact, in South Africa, it was previously extended beyond just the Ambassador/High Commissioner. And we do this even for countries that don't extend the same courtesy to us during their own elections."

Government urged all those participating in the election to cooperate with the observers.

Government has further encouraged all South Africans, especially young and first-time voters, to exercise their democratic right to vote. Young people comprise a large proportion of South Africa's population, and "the future should be forged by them", government said on Tuesday.

The 2014 Elections hold a special significance for South Africans, as the year marks the celebration of 20 Years of Freedom since the first democratic elections on 27 April 1994.

Special voting going "very well": IEC

Today's start of special votes at voting stations and home visits had been a good systems and readiness check which had gone very well, says IEC Chairperson Advocate Pansy Tlakula.

"Just under 400,000 voters had successfully informed the Chief Electoral Officer of their intention to cast a special vote today and tomorrow - either at their voting station or by being visited by election officials in the case of voters who are disabled, pregnant or ill," she said on Monday.

She was briefing reporters at the Independent Electoral Commission's (IEC) first press conference for the 2014 General

Elections at the Results Operations Centre in Pretoria.

"Special voting was taking place in all but 3,593 of the country's voting districts where no special votes had been applied for. This provided a very good "dry run" and systems check for Wednesday," said Tlakula said.

Disruptions of special votes

She said only minor instances of primarily logistical issues were reported during the day, such as high winds along the eastern seaboard in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, which had blown over tents erected as temporary voting stations overnight.

However, she said the tents had been re-erected today. "Other incidents reported included the delayed opening of isolated voting stations due to delays of material deliveries, staff arrivals and some difficulties in gaining access to premises.

"There were some isolated incidents of community protest action which were reported to the security structures and SA Police Service had been deployed in these areas to monitor the situation and to ensure the security of the voting process," she said.

With regard to the torched community hall in the troubled Sterkspruit in the Eastern Cape, the IEC chairperson said the torched facility was not the one they were using as a voting station.

Government has since condemned the torching of the room at Ekuzoleni Primary School at Sterkspruit, as a callous act by criminal elements hell-bent on trying to destabilise the area ahead of May elections.

Despite this, the voting at the school continued successfully as planned.

"The police have deployed a high-level team to track down and bring the perpetrators to book. Community members are urged to remain calm and look forward to cast their votes on Wednesday, 7 May 2014. Intimidation is a serious crime and government will act accordingly," Government Communications and Information System (GCIS) Acting CEO Phumla Williams said on Monday.

There are security plans currently under implementation to ensure that all voting stations, related material, deployed personnel and the public are secured.

"Government is determined to protect South Africans from any form of intimidation," Williams said.

Special votes from abroad

Tlakula announced that just over 12,000 marked ballots had arrived by courier from international voting stations.

She said they are being reconciled against the list of voters who successfully notified the Chief Electoral Officer of their intention to vote outside South Africa.

"The ballot papers will then be set aside in ballot boxes and securely stored until local voting stations close and the counting of all ballot papers starts at 9pm on 7 May. The votes from all international voting stations will be combined into a single international voting district.

"More ballots are expected to arrive today and tomorrow from other international destinations. It will only be known how many voters cast their votes at international voting stations last week once counting begins but approximately 27,000 voters were expected to vote abroad," she said.

Voting stations open for all registered voters at 7am tomorrow and voting will continue until 9pm.

Registered voters should vote at the voting station where they are registered and must have their green barcoded ID book, a temporary ID certificate or a new smart ID card in order to vote.

Over 60 million ballot papers distributed: IEC

The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) have printed and distributed 62.8 million ballot papers for May 7 General Elections, IEC Chairperson Pansy Tlakula announced on Monday.

According to Tlakula, 31.4 million are national ballot papers, while 31.5 are provincial ballot papers, adding that the ballot printing required in excess of 500 tons of paper.

"The national ballot paper is the longest yet for an election in South Africa containing 29 contesting parties, this is three more than contested the 2009 General Elections," she said.

Other materials that have been distributed includes over 220,000 ballot boxes; 412,000 staff ID stickers; 83,000 banners; over 100,000 voting station demarcation tape and almost 60 stationary packs.

"In such packs, we included over 580,000 pens, 116,000 rulers; 2.9 tons of twine, 2.9km of tape, 4.65 million sheets of note paper; 2.9 tons of rubber bands; over 58,000 permanent markers; 11.7 tons of re-usable rubber putty and almost 3 million paper clips," she said.

The IEC chairperson was briefing reporters at the Independent Electoral Commission's (IEC) first press conference for the 2014 General Elections at the Results Operations Centre in Pretoria.

Tlakula said security materials such as 120,000 security stamps to mark ballot papers and over 27,000 tamper-evident tapes for sealing sensitive documents and boxes as well as 118,000 indelible ink pens to mark voters fingers were handled separately from the mainstream of electoral material deliveries.

"We want to remind voters that their ballot papers must be stamped with a security stamp by election officials when they are issued to the voter. All unstamped ballot papers will not be counted," she said.

The certified voters' roll for Wednesday elections contains 25.39 million names.

The master voters' roll which was printed for use in the voting stations on voting involved over 24 000 unique and separate segments of the voters' roll totalling 1.8 million pages, requiring 8.6 tons of papers.

Tlakula also wished her 218,000 officials the very best for the next few days, further expressing her confidence that they will again live up to the highest reputation of excellence that South Africa and the world have come to expect from them.

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