Scottish Independence Referendum
September 18th, 2014
ISCA-AIDC Observation Mission
Preliminary Report
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Preamble

International Sustainable Community Assistance - Appui International Durable aux Communautés (ISCA-AIDC) assessed Scotland’s 2014 referendum in accordance with international standards, commitments and obligations for genuine democratic elections, as stated in the Copenhagen Declaration of 1990 of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

ISCA-AIDC subscribes to the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observers and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers that was passed at the United Nations on October 27, 2005, and endorsed by 42 intergovernmental and international organizations. In all of our missions’ activities, ISCA-AIDC pledges to adhere to domestic laws, and to respect the core election observation principles of impartiality and non-interference.

ISCA-AIDC is an incorporated not-for-profit organisation which believes in the right to self-determination, the dignity of each individual and incorporates dialogue, mutual respect, fairness and consideration of local culture, resources and capacities in all its activities. For more information, please visit www.isca-aidc.ca.
Executive Summary

Since 2004, ISCA-AIDC has been committed to supporting community development throughout the world. At the core of project development is a focus on democratic processes and good governance. While the organization generally focuses on democratic and governance issues at a community level, it has supported electoral process training in Canada sponsoring the first ever open BRIDGE (Building Resources in Democracy, Governance, and Elections) training session in North America.

ISCA-AIDC established a Scottish Independence Referendum Observation team of 16 observers from Canada, the United States, Dominican Republic, and Ireland to observe the Scottish Independence Referendum campaign in its finals days, voting in 138 polling stations in 10 of Scotland’s administrative areas and monitored the ballot counting in 2 counting centres.

A strong democratic commitment was demonstrated in the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum by both campaigners and voters. The electoral process progressed with vigorous public debate, remarkable levels of voter participation, and general acceptance of the results. More than 4.2 million people had registered to vote — 97% of those eligible — including residents as young as 16 and 17. With voter turnout at 84.6%, it demonstrates that voters were effectively engaged and empowered to exercise their right to vote.

Scotland’s referendum has been an extremely rare democratic event. It has spawned a pluralistic, civic-driven politics that the world has been compelled to watch and learn from. ISCA-AIDC is pleased to have been part of this historic event. While ISCA-AISC observers concluded that there may exist an opportunity to address several procedural compliance issues, the referendum represented the will of the Scottish people and yielded credible results.
Introduction

Elections are one of the essential components of any democracy. The right to political participation, including the right to vote in elections, is enshrined in the United Nation’s International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which states:

Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any of the distinctions mentioned in Article 2 [race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status] and without unreasonable restrictions: (a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives, (b) To vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free will of the electors....

Code of Conduct

While each observer signed the UK Electoral Commission’s Code of Conduct, members of the observation group developed a supplementary team code of conduct statement which included the following statements:

- As observers, we will wear passes, introduce ourselves as accredited observers with ISCA-AIDC and state that we are here to observe and report.
- As observers, we will interact with everyone with respect and impartiality.
- As observers we will endeavour to observe and record verifiable facts and observations as they pertain to the accuracy of the results.

All observers received two days of formal training prior to observing the referendum vote. Training covered areas such as international election observation methodology, the historical context of the referendum, the referendum legislation, and polling day procedures.

Findings and Observations

Each observer was required to complete one observation form for each polling station he/she visited. The form was designed to be similar to those used in European Union Election Observation Missions and provides a standardized method for each observer to evaluate the conditions in a particular polling station. The goal

1 Article 25; http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CCPR.aspx
of having observers complete these forms was to collect information on the following areas:

- circumstances outside the polling station,
- circumstances inside the polling station,
- arrangements and transparency inside the polling station,
- the voters list,
- voting procedures,
- officials and (un)authorized persons in the premises,
- overall transparency, and
- general environmental assessment.

While further evaluation and analysis of data collected by ISCA-AIDC observers is still ongoing, there are some preliminary findings contained in this preliminary report.

Six teams observed polling in a total of 138 polling stations on referendum day, September 18th, 2014, in ten of the administrative areas:

- Edinburgh,
- East Lothian,
- Midlothian,
- West Lothian,
- Falkirk,
- Fife,
- Scottish Borders,
- North Lanarkshire,
- South Lanarkshire, and
- Glasgow.

Of the 138 polling stations, 6 were also observed during the opening of the polls and 6 were observed during the closing of the polls. Where observers viewed the closing of the polls, they followed the polling materials to that polling station’s Central Counting Centre, where they monitored the verification and reconciliation of ballots.

An observation in a polling station lasted 29.69 minutes (average). During an observation in a polling station, 17 people were observed voting (average).
Graph 1 – Gender of Presiding Officers

Graph 2 – Gender of Polling Clerks

Graph 3 – All persons had a clear view of the voting procedures in the polling station
Graph 4 – Were observers in anyway restricted in observing voting procedures

Graph 5 – Overall conduct of polling stations

Graph 6 - General environment and circumstances in the polling station
Graph 7 – Transparency of overall voting process at polling station

Graph 8 – Call-out of voter’s name and identification

Graph 9 – Recording of voter identification
It is worth noting that in each of the 138 polling stations where observers watched the voting process, voting was conducted in a peaceful and respectful manner. No campaigning or campaign materials were present inside any of the polling stations.

While all team members found the process to be largely transparent, procedural issues were observed. For example, in response to the question “Were the voter’s name and ID number called out?” in 46 polling stations (PS) (or 38.7% of the time, not including observations with no responses) observers noted that this was not done. In 10 (8.4 %) PS this procedure was followed only sometimes, and in 22 of the observations (18.5 %) it was mostly followed, and in 41 (34.4 %) polling stations it was always followed. (See graph 8)

Similarly observers noted that voters did not show the number on the back of the ballot to the Presiding Officer before depositing the ballot into the ballot box on 95 observations, or 73.1 % of the polling stations where this was observed (not including no responses, see Graph 10). This was “Always” done in only 7 observations (or 5.3 %).

This was not the case with marking the voters ID number on the corresponding number list next to the ballot issued. In this instance procedures were followed in 107 observations (82.3 % of the time, not including no responses). It was reported in only 6 instances (4.6 % of the time) that this procedure was not followed.

In every observation it was found that there was a clear and unobstructed view of the voting procedures. And there was a high degree of transparency among polling staff (See Graph 3). All observers especially noted that their presence was welcomed by all polling staff. However, there were a few observations (less than 16%) that observers felt they were somewhat restricted in viewing voting procedures. In some
of those instances, for example, it was commented that they were seated in an area too far away to clearly see, or hear, the proceedings.

In 8 observations (or 5.8% of total responses) observers responded yes to the question “Was physical access to the polling place difficult?” Reasons for difficulty in accessing the polling place varied from slope of a wheelchair ramp, narrowness of doors, or no wheelchair access at all. In 10 observations (7.2% of total responses) observers responded yes when asked “Can wheelchairs easily get around inside the polling station?” Observations to this ranged from polling stations inside a small room, layout of the polling station, or the polling station being too crowded.

General observations

It was noted that Presiding Officers could have been better identified (with a highly visible vest or shirt) which may improve flow of voters, particularly in instances when turnout was quite high. Voters were observed looking for assistance, and with high visibility vests or badges the voter could more easily and quickly have found the official for further instructions/directions. There did not appear to be any consistent identification of official polling staff. In a few cases they might have had name badges and in other cases no identification whatsoever.

In every polling station there were sufficient numbers of voting compartments. However, it was the positioning of the booths that in some instances did not ensure the secrecy of ballot. In particular, those voters in wheelchairs voting on a lower table in a voting compartment could not mark their ballot while effectively ensuring no one could view how they were marking their ballot. In some instances this problem was compounded where polling stations were situated in very small halls/community centres/classrooms. Those waiting to vote would in some cases be standing very close to voters in the voting compartment casting their ballot. This may have, in some cases, led to unnecessary duress to a voter who feels someone is trying to view how they are marking their ballot.

In a number of instances, voters were turned away due to their name not appearing on the voters list. In some cases it was a simple error on the part of the voter not being in the correct polling station, and polling staff would direct them to the proper polling station. In other cases where the voter was in the proper polling station and their name did not appear on the voters list, the polling staff would call the Council Office to verify whether or not the name was on the voters list. In a number of cases the voter was then allowed to vote as their name was on the most recent list in the Council office. However, this process was not consistent across all polling stations visited.
Initial Conclusions and Recommendations

The Scottish Independence Referendum had a high level of transparency and fairness in its processes. Every attempt was made by polling station staff to ensure that a voter was able to vote. This high degree of professionalism by polling staff, who were peers and neighbours of those voting in the polling station contributes to the credibility of results.

Based on the findings of the ISCA-AIDC team, a number of observations may be offered for consideration, based on the procedures used in this referendum:

- The 138 randomly selected polling stations from across 10 administrative areas represent only a fraction of the 5,579 polling stations across Scotland. However, taken together, ISCA-AIDC’s observations present a “snap-shot” of voting day activities. ISCA-AIDC was committed to following International Standards of Election Observation Methodology and believes that the results of this observation mission are a representative sampling.

- All polling locations except for one were accessible by voters using a wheelchair or walker. The one location that was not accessible had a couple of steps and doorways that were too narrow to accommodate any size of wheelchair. At this location, a voter in a wheelchair or using a walker that was not sufficiently ambulatory to climb the steps on their own would have needed the ballot box brought outside to accommodate for their disability.

- Most locations were easily accessible by all voters, however some locations had small thresholds that could be a barrier for someone using a walker, and in other locations the parking lot was a long way from the polling station. For a few locations, there were two routes of travel: one for the ordinary voter and a different route for those using wheelchairs or walkers. When there were two routes, the route for those with wheelchairs or walkers was generally longer than the ordinary route of travel.

- The practice of calling out the voter’s name and voter ID number was not strictly followed as outlined in the training manual and legislation. Where it was observed that polling staff not following this procedure, it did not appear to impact on the overall voting process. Nevertheless, if this procedure is a legal requirement, then it should be followed to avoid criticism by political candidates and/or parties.

- The stated procedure of showing the number on the ballot to the Presiding Officer before depositing it into the ballot box should be considered. In most cases this did not happen. In addition, on most occasions voters were not
being observed when putting the ballot into the ballot box. This was most often attributed to the polling staff being busy, and additional staff may be required if this practice is deemed important to the process.

- Identification of polling staff could be improved. This would add credibility to the process and improve the flow rate of voters through polling stations.

- Observers noted that they were able to follow the voting materials (ballot boxes and ballot paper account) from the polling stations where they observed the close of polls, to the appropriate counting centres. Once there, observers were able to view the receipt of poll materials and observe the verification and reconciliation of ballots for that polling station. The counting centres were noted to be well organized, efficient, and accurate.

- ISCA-AIDC observed counting in two administrative areas – Edinburgh and Midlothian. It was the general conclusion of observer teams, in each of these counting centres, that the verification and reconciliation of the ballot paper accounts, as well the counting of ballots, was conducted in an open, transparent and professional manner, ensuring accurate and credible results. Upon request, observers were shown each step of the verification, reconciliation and counting process by counting centre staff, as well as the receipt of postal ballots and the signature verification process. Observers were given access to all processes in the counting centre throughout the evening.

- The preliminary report does not address issues concerning how the campaign was conducted or how various media outlets covered the issues.

- This preliminary statement covers only initial findings and more comprehensive final report will follow in due course. Further analysis will determine rates of voting throughout voting day, peak voting hours, examination of further voting procedures, media presence, variations amongst administrative areas, and campaign presence outside the voting areas.

While ISCA-AISC observers have concluded that there does exist an opportunity to address several procedural areas in the polling procedures and related training for polling staff, the referendum recorded the decision of the electorate and yielded credible results.
Mission Team

Core Team:

Lloyd Dalziel, Mission Organizer
David MacKay, Press Officer
Kimberly Kippen, Election Analyst
Stephanie Plante, Election Analyst
Nicole MacRae, Election Analyst

Referendum Day Teams:

Team: Glasgow South
Members: Kimberly Kippen, Ken Doiron, Patty Moss

Team: Scottish Borders
Members: Ed Ward, Tara O’Connor, Maria Ward

Team: Fife
Members: Paul McCormick, Nicole MacRae, Alison Jackson

Team: Falkirk
Members: Stephanie Plante, Bart Forbes, Diana German

Team: East Lothian
Members: John Gillis, Michael Grange

Team: Glasgow North
Members: Lloyd Dalziel, David MacKay
Schedule

Wednesday, September 10th, 2014
6:00 p.m. Core team arrives

Monday, September 15th, 2014

7:00 p.m. – 7:15 p.m. Official introductions, Location: Davidson Room, St Andrew's and St George's West, 13 George Street

7:15 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. Mission Logistics Overview, Lloyd Dalziel, Mission Organizer

8:30 p.m. – 9:30 p.m. Introduction to election observation training, Dr. Helena Catt

Tuesday, September 16th, 2014

9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Election Observation Training, Facilitator – Dr. Helena Catt, Location: Davidson Room, St Andrew's and St George's West, 13 George Street

Wednesday, September 17th, 2014

9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. Review of Referendum Day Procedures, Lloyd Dalziel, Mission Organizer. Location: Davidson Room, St Andrew's and St George's West, 13 George Street

10:30 a.m. – 12:00 Noon Briefing with the Electoral Commission

1:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. Election Observation Training, Facilitator – Dr. Helena Catt, Location: St Andrew's and St George's West, 13 George Street

Thursday, September 18th, 2014 – Referendum day

6:30 a.m. – Depart from lobby of Motel One Edinburg Royal for observation

Friday, September 19th, 2014

11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Debriefing

Sunday, September 21st, 2014

Participants depart
Acknowledgements

ISCA-AIDC would like to acknowledge many of the individuals who contributed to the successful observation of the Scottish Referendum

Lindsay Hamilton, Business Support Officer, The Electoral Commission for all her help in assisting in the accrediting of observers.

The Electoral Commission for the briefing for all international observers and their strong commitment to openness.

Dr. Helena Catt for the excellent election observation training.

Jean Howard, St Andrew’s and St George’s West Church, for making all of us so welcome during the training sessions.

Russell Gray, Muirhead Chauffeur and his team of excellent drivers