

AU observers urge Ugandans on poll rights

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KAMPALA. The head of the African Union Election Observation Mission (AUEOM), Ms Sophia Akuffo, has called upon Ugandans to turn up in large numbers to exercise their right to vote today and also remain peaceful as the country chooses the next president.

In an interview with the *Daily Monitor* yesterday in Kampala, Ms Akuffo, also a former president of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights and Judge of the Supreme Court of Ghana, said a team of 41 short-term observers from 28 African countries has been deployed to observe the polling process in 13 districts in all the regions.

"People should not fear to exercise their rights. Go peacefully, cast your vote, obey the law, move out of the perimeter according to the regulations and probably go about your normal business as you wait for the results," Ms Akuffo said.

"Our team has already familiarised itself with electoral laws and each one of us on the team will observe the lack of intimidation as it is the common practice so we observe on our way and at the polling station," she noted, adding that they will observe the opening of the voting, closure and the commencement of vote counting and events in-between.

Asked whether the AU observers are allowed to use electronic gadgets within the polling station perimeter fence, Ms Akuffo said the Electoral Commission had cleared the use of their gadgets during an earlier briefing.

"The assessment and observations of the mission will be guided by the principles and guidelines stated in these instruments, other relevant international instruments guiding international election observation and the legal framework for elections in the Republic of Uganda," MS SOPHIA AKUFFO, HEAD AFRICAN UNION ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION

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She added that they are not in the country to vote but to observe the election.

Ms Akuffo also said the mission will issue a statement of its preliminary assessment of the elections on February 20 at a press conference in Kampala. A final and comprehensive report will be released within two months from the date of announcement of final election results.

In case of a re-run, she said the team will be notified about the next course of action since the next elections cannot be re-organised in less than 72 hours after the results have been announced.

The AUEOM's mandate is derived from relevant AU instruments such as the 2007 African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance; the 2002 AU/OAU Declaration on Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa; and the 2002 AU Guidelines for Elections Observation and Monitoring Missions.