

## 8. Interpreting the facts: reports writing:

Usually, as soon as practicable after the observation has been completed, the observe group issues an interim or a preliminary statement. An interim statement represents a summary of findings of the group and gives a general appraisal.

An interim statement should not be the end of the road. Having issued it, the group then settles down to write it's final and detailed reports. Where the observer group is large some of the persons who took part in the observation may not be involved in the writing of the report. In fact, in some cases, the report may be entrusted to an entirely separate group that has expertise in election observation report writing.

But whatever the case may be, certain percepts have found to be useful in writing the report. They include:

- Utmost care must be taken in the use of election language, such as free and fair, fraud, rigging, and irregularity.
- Performance lapse and genuine mistakes should be separated from deliberate wrongdoing and treated differently
- The report must be deliberately a sense of proportion through careful assessments of the distribution and effect of any occurrences. In particular, irregularities must be carefully examined to determine their probable overall effect on the electoral outcome
- Care should be taken not to include in the report as facts allegations of wrong doing in the reports as facts allegations of wrongdoing that could not be confirmed
- The report must be structured in a logical manner. For oragnisations that do observation often, it is advisable to adopt a standard format fro report writing. This makes it possible to create a cumulative and comparative record of progress and setbacks in electoral democracy over the years.

It is important to remember that, ultimately, the verdict that the observer is required to make is whether or not Ghana followed its own laws, rules regulations and procedures in doing the election. Of course, this should not prevent the observer group from making recommendations on institutional and procedural matters that could improve the holding of future elections. But such recommendations should be viewed as supplementary and separated from actual findings relating to the oragnisations and conduct of the particular election.