

## **Amhara and Qemant people’s referendum**

As stated under article 27 of the electoral law, the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia conducts different types of elections. One of these is referendum. According to article 32 of the amended electoral law of Ethiopia proclamation no. 532/2007, this is conducted to assess public interest or make decision when decided by a competent body.

Thus, a request to hold a referendum to determine for Qemant to either “stay under the old administration” or to “be established as a self-autonomous administration “in the Amhara regional state North Gondar zone in four woredas and 12 kebeles where ethnic Amaras and Qemant people live was made. The House of Federation made a request to the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia, to hold a referendum on July 20, 2017 via letter no.(ፌ.ዴ.ዎ/ዎአፈ/5/245).

The plan was executed after incorporating the feedbacks on the timetable.

## **Legal framework for referendum**

Article 32- 532/2007

- 1) Referendum is conducted to assess public interest or make decision when decided by a competent body in accordance with the constitution.
- 2) The Board, in accordance with the directive given by the body that authorized the referendum, shall hold the referendum by organizing polling stations in a way convenient to execute the referendum.
- 3) Particulars shall be determined by the regulation to be issued by the board.

In the same proclamation, these are the necessary requirements to vote on a referendum-

In order to vote a person must be:

- Ethiopian citizen
- Resident living in kebeles and woredas within Amhara region
- 18 years or above on date of registration
- Has been residing in the kebele for six months
- For the referendum, a person can register after providing evidence that he/she is a permanent resident and proof of identity.

- Election officers must verify the voter's residency.

Those who are ineligible to vote are:

- Non-Ethiopian citizens
- A person below 18 years on date of registration and has been residing in the area for less than six months
- A person who is proved to be incapable of deciding due to mental disorder by an appropriate organ;
- A person whose electoral rights are restricted by law or by a court of law.

### **Preparation for the referendum**

The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia has been undertaking several preparations ahead of the referendum.

A technical committee was established to gather information in the fields. This committee was established to facilitate the referendum in 12 Kebeles where ethnic Amharas and Qemants live intermingled.

Thus, in order to create conducive environment in the four woredas a total of thirty-four polling stations were established: three polling stations in Gondar city, 15 polling stations in Chilga woreda, 14 polling stations in Metemma woreda, and two polling stations in Quara woreda. In addition, temporary woreda coordinating offices were established due to their proximity. These temporary coordinating offices were in Aykel town to coordinate Chilga woreda, Genda Wuha town to coordinate Metemma and Quara and in Gondar city to coordinate Gondar.

### **Timetable**

The referendum took place on September 17, 2017, and registered voters voted from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. in a peaceful manner. According to the timetable, election of public observer and briefing on voting processes was provided on September 3, 2017.

## **Polling stations**

During preparations for the referendum, the board's experts carried out a field study and gathered information about polling stations. Accordingly, thirty-four polling stations were established. A request to establish additional polling stations in Metemma woreda, Akushara kebele in Lebasa polling station, due to river overflow, was accepted. To this end a new polling station, Genete Mariam polling station, was established on September 08, 2017 and commenced voters' registration. At last, the referendum took place in four woredas (eight kebeles) in 24 polling stations in a peaceful, democratic, and in a fair manner with huge voters turn out.

The referendum was conducted in four woredas-

- **Gondar city administration-** Debreka Bilajeg kebele had three (3) polling stations: Debreka, Tegediche and Amedige.
- **Chilga woreda-** the referendum was planned to take place in fifteen (15) polling stations throughout six kebeles. These were: Negade Bahir (two polling stations), Quaber Lomiye (two polling stations), Nara Awedardar (five polling stations), Geledibal (two polling stations), Anker Adeza (two polling stations) and Laza Shamge (two polling stations).
- **Metemma woreda-** the referendum was conducted in fourteen (14) polling stations in four kebeles. These were: Tumet (five polling stations), Shinfa (four polling stations), Akushara (three polling stations) and Kemechela (two polling stations).
- **Quara woreda-** the referendum was conducted in two polling stations in Kozera kebele: Kozera A and Kozera B.

## **Referendum officers**

In order to conduct the referendum, the board recruited existing and experienced poll workers with no direct interest in the matter from Oromia region, Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples' Region, Benishangul Gumuz region and Addis Ababa city administration. In addition, a two-day referendum officers training took place to train officers on referendum manual, legal frameworks, registration and polling process, and on how to use forms.

## **Voting Materials**

The board printed and delivered all necessary referendum materials along with ballot papers printed in color to be used for registration and on referendum day.

## **Voters' registration and voters' information**

According to the timetable set by the board, voters' registration took place for ten consecutive days, including weekends and holidays, from September 4, 2017 to September 13, 2017.

As mentioned above, observers' election was conducted peacefully in the twenty-four polling stations in four woredas (eight kebeles).

## **Public Observers' election**

According to the timetable, election of public observers and briefing on voting processes took place on September 3, 2017.

From the four woredas the referendum will be conducted in-

- **Gondar city administration-** public observers' election took place in Tegediche and Amedge polling stations, as per the timetable. Although election did not take place as planned in Debreqa polling station, the public showed up at the polling station to elect observers on September 04, 2017.
- **Chilega woreda-** although the referendum was planned to take place in fifteen polling station throughout six kebeles, public observers' election and briefing on voting processes was given in only four polling stations within two kebeles: Negade Bahir and QuaberLomiye. Since discussion with the community and administration bodies took much time, observers' election did not take place in Nara Awedardar, Geledibal, Anker Adeza and LazaShamge.
- **Metemma woreda-** public observers' election and briefing on voting processes took place, as planned, in fourteen polling station throughout four kebeles.
- **Quara woreda-** observers' election and briefing on voting processes took place, as planned, in the two polling stations.

## **Polling, counting and announcement of results**

### **Voting process**

All polling stations were established in as safe and secure manner, one day before referendum. Referendum took place on September 17, 2017 as per the timetable. Polling took place from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. after minutes were recorded by referendum poll workers, observers’, option agents from previous administration and advocates of Qemant self-administration. Similarly, a closing minute on overall process was held after the voting ended.

**Vote counting**

After polling was concluded, information about the number of voters, number of spoiled and unused ballot papers, and the presence of a sealed ballot box were all verified and recorded in a minute. Subsequently, vote counting took place in the presence of poll workers, observers, option agents from previous administration and advocates of Qemant self-administration.

Right after vote counting ended, minutes attesting to the validity of the voting and vote counting were recorded and forms were signed in the presence of poll workers, observers, option agents from previous administration and advocates of Qemant self-administration. A copy of the results form was also given to the option agent that signed on the form.

**Announcement of Results**

According to the timetable, official announcement of results at the polling stations was on September 08, 2017. Results were posted in all 24 polling stations and a table depicting the overall results in a table is provided below:

**List of Result announcement**

<b>Type of information</b>	<b>Total number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Number of registered voters	23,283	
Number of people who voted	20,831	89.4%
Number of people who did not vote	2,454	10.5%

Number of registered voters in Gondar city	3,069	13.2%
Number of registered voters in Chilga woreda	5,939	25.6%
Number of registered voters in Metemma woreda	10,866	46.7%
Number of registered voters in Quara woreda	3,409	14.7%
Cancelled votes		
Invalid ballot papers	1,744	7.5%

## **Complaints regarding the referendum and dispute resolutions**

### **Complaints raised during voters' registration and their resolution**

In eight kebeles where Amharas and Qemants people live intemixed, voters' registration was mostly peaceful. However, complaints raised in few polling stations were resolved as follows:

#### **A. Gondar city administration**

- When electoral roll was publicized on September 15, 2017 in BilajegDebreka kebele, Ato Chale, an agent from Amhara administration, raised a complaint claiming there were 36 under-ages and non-residents registered to vote. The polling station Grievance Hearing Committee tried to gather evidence and investigate the case. The complaint was dismissed because out of the 36, six were residents of the kebele, seven haven't been registered and the remaining 23 were anonymous and their surnames unknown.
- In Tegediche polling station, an agent from Qemant raised a complaint claiming 100 residents of the kebele were denied registration. The polling station Grievance Hearing Committee dismissed the complaint after verifying that the people were residents of kebele 16, Qusquam area.

#### **B. Chilga woreda**

- In Negade Bahir kebele, Negade Bahir polling station A, a person raised a complaint claiming they were denied registration. The complaint was dismissed after the Grievance Hearing Committee verified that person was not resident of the kebele.
- In Negade Bahir polling station A, agents of Qemant raised a complaint on 55 people saying they weren't residents for five years and on under-age voting. The Grievance Hearing Committee verified the ages of those claimed underage through testimonies by their parents. As for the 55 people, the Grievance Hearing Committee dismissed the complaint and let the people register after it has been proved by observers and agents that they fulfill all the requirements to vote.
- In Quaber polling station, complaints by an agent from Amhara were raised claiming 43 residents of Engidiye kebele have been fraudulently registered and that ten people should return their registration cards because they were residents of Negade Bahir. Subsequently, a letter was written from Engidiye kebele and Negade Bahir kebele on September 15, 2017, stating "to leave after verifying". The Grievance Hearing Committee gave the following decision:
  - The letter from Engidiye had no letter number;
  - The letter had no heading saying "as per the polling station's letter" and no letter was written for both polling stations,
  - Since voters' registration took place after verification by observers and minutes were recorded daily, the complaint has been dismissed.
- On the other hand, the complaint claiming 43 people were from Engediye kebele reached the woreda Grievance Hearing Committee on September 16, 2017 on 6 p.m. and it investigated the case on September 17, 2017. From the 43 people listed the one mentioned under no. 1 is a public observer elected by 402 votes and wrote a letter, whose heading made it seem as if it was a response to prior letter written by the polling station. Although the authenticity of the letter was questioned, it was decided that they vote after providing identification and title deed for land ownership in QuaberLomiye kebele. In addition, QuaberLomiye kebele administration verified residency of the 43 people on September 17, 2017. Both sides verified this and signed the form. (Letters written by Engibada, NegadeBahi and QuaberLomiye kebele administrations has been annexed).A

complaint was raised claiming seven registered voters were not residents of QuaberLomiye for five years. But the complaint was dismissed due to lack of supporting evidence.

- In QuaberLomiye polling station, a person raised a complaint claiming he was denied registration. After verifying his residency, the Grievance Hearing Committee decided the complainant be registered as a voter.
- In Lomiye polling station, an agent from Qemant raised a complaint on three people claiming they were not residents for five years and for revocation of their voter's card because of their residency in a different kebele. The Grievance Hearing Committee at the polling station decided that they retain their voter's card.(An appeal was made to the woreda electoral office, which overturned the decision of the Grievance Hearing Committee and requested the names be cancelled from the register).
- In Lomiye polling station, an agent from Qemant raised a complaint on 17 people claiming they were not residents for five years and thus asked for revocation of their voter's card. The Grievance Hearing Committee at the polling station decided that they retain their voter's card because the registration took place after both observers agreed on it.(An appeal was made to the woreda electoral office, which sustained the decision of the Grievance Hearing Committee).
- In Negade Bahir polling station B, an agent from Qemant raised a complaint on 30 people claiming they were either under-age registered voters and contesting registration of a person who was not residents for five years. After investigating the case the Grievance Hearing Committee decided all 26 be registered to vote while the remaining four shouldn't.
- In Negade Bahir polling station B, agents from Qemant raised a complaint to investigate people registered in the electoral roll without their presence, these are: registered from number 387 to 496 in electoral roll 1 and from number 384 to 496 on electoral roll 2. The Grievance Hearing Committee decided that they view the electoral rolls when they are displayed to the public. Similarly, in Negade Bahir polling station B, complaints were raised, by agents from Qemant, on 96 and 29 ineligible registered voters and on under-age registration. The Grievance Hearing Committee dismissed the complaint due to lack



of evidence and absence of official seal on the letter. (An appeal was made to the woreda electoral office, which sustained the decision of the Grievance Hearing Committee).

### **C. Metemma woreda**

- In Akushara Kebele, Belebasa polling station, one person claimed they were denied registration. The Committee decided to register the person as a voter after looking at evidences and witnesses.
- In Shinfa kebele, Shinfa B polling station, a person raised a complaint because they were denied registration for not residing in the area for five years. The Committee, after proving the person's residence through three witnesses, decided to register that person as a voter.
- In Shinfa kebele, Shinfa polling station B, a person raised a complaint because he was denied registration for not residing in the area for five years. The Committee dismissed the complaint after the complainant has failed to prove his residency for five years either through witness or material evidence.
- In Shinfa kebele, Shinfa polling station A, a Qemant agent raised a complaint contesting the registration of a person who did not reside in the area for five years. The complaint was dismissed because the material evidence the agent provided to support his case was an employment contract confirming the plaintiff's employment in Zenbaba Medium Clinic in the kebele not verification of residency.

### **Complaints raised during referendum polling day and their resolution**

An appeal was made to Woreda Grievance Hearing Committee by an Amhara agent prohibiting 43 people from voting in Chilga woreda, QuaberLomiye polling station. The Woreda Grievance Hearing Committee went to the polling station and made sure the aforementioned 43 cast their votes after providing proof of residency. Subsequently, all 43 people provided their proof of residency and QuaberLomiye kebele administration provided evidence confirming their residency in the kebele.

### **Challenges**

- Public observers' election did not take place in Gondar city administration, Deberka polling station, as planned.

- There were misunderstandings regarding accessibility of a newly established polling station:Kozera B polling station in Quara woreda Kozera kebele.
- Request for establishment of additional polling station in Metemma woreda Akushara kebele, Belebasa polling station due to river overflow,
- Voters' registration not taking place in 11 polling stations in four kebeles in Chilga woreda,
- A complaint claiming forty-three people from Engediba kebele registering in Chilga woreda, QuaberLomiye polling station reached the woreda Grievance Hearing Committee on September 16, 2017 on 12 p.m. after refusing to follow the decision of Grievance Hearing Station at the polling station. On the referendum day, polling was delayed until 8:00 a.m. because the complainants prohibited polling until their complaints were address and because of observer's refusal to sign. Polling started on 8:00 after the arrival of the woreda Grievance Hearing Committee.
- In the same polling station, polling was interrupted from 2:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. due to heavy rain.

## **Remedies**

- Although observers' election did not take place in Gondar city administration, Deberka polling station, as planned, the public casted their votes on September 04,2017 following a public discussion with the community, administration and Joint-Committee.
- Since Kozera polling station A in Quara woreda,Kozera kebele was a newly established polling station, a solution to increase its accessibility was made after the issue was discussed by administrations, Joint-Committee and referendum poll workers.
- Following a request made by the Joint Council, the Board established an additional polling station in Genete Mariam area was set up to allow voters who were unable to vote in Metemma woreda, Akushara kebele due to river overflow. This was done in order to increase public participation and accessibility. The Board also recruited poll workers, prepared materials and documents to ensure voters' registration took place, as planned.
- Neither voters' registration nor observers' election took place in eleven polling stations in Chilga woreda four kebeles.

- Polling was delayed in Quaber polling station due to claims of fraudulent registration by 43 residents of Engibabda kebele. The Woreda Grievance Hearing Committee went to the area and decided that these people be registered after providing proof of residence. A minute was recorded to this end before polling commenced.
- Although polling was temporarily halted due to heavy rain, concerted efforts were made to ensure that polling was conducted on time.