**7th ETHIOPIAN NATIONAL AND REGIONAL ELECTIONS HELD ON JUNE 1, 2026**

**Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA) Observation of Violence against Women in Elections (VAW-E)**

**Preliminary Statement issued on Wednesday, June 4, 2026**

## Introduction

The Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA) deployed 60 trained volunteered citizen election observers as part of its efforts to promote women political participation during the 7th Ethiopian General Election. The observers were deployed across nine regions (Amhara, Oromia, Afar, Gambela, Sidama, Benishangul-Gumuz, Central Ethiopia, and South Ethiopia) and two administrative cities (Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa). The observers were deployed in 18 zones, and six cities. This observation was conducted under EWLA's **Violence Against Women in Elections (VAW-E)** initiative, which seeks to safeguard women's right to participate safely, freely, and meaningfully in electoral processes. The mission assessed the extent to which women were able to exercise their rights without intimidation, harassment, or exclusion, while also monitoring electoral integrity.

The observation mission targeted 156 polling stations. EWLA's methodology combined 80 percent mobile observers and 20 percent stationary observers, ensuring broad geographic coverage and continuous monitoring of polling-day activities. This preliminary statement is based on observation data received from 136 polling stations.

## Overall Assessment

EWLA's preliminary observation found that Ethiopia's 7th General Election was conducted in a largely orderly and peaceful manner across the polling stations observed. Most polling stations observed opened on time; were properly staffed and equipped; and allowed authorized observers and party agents unrestricted access throughout the day. Voting, closing, and counting procedures were broadly followed in accordance with electoral regulations.

## 1. Polling Station Opening, Setup, and Voting Process

- **Opening Procedures:** EWLA observers were granted access to the 136 polling stations deployed by 5:50 AM, enabling full observation. Heavy rainfall in Assosa

(Benishangul-Gumuz Region) caused delays in some stations, creating logistical challenges.

- **Environment:** Separate queues for women and men were maintained in 5.4% of the polling stations, while 36% had no such arrangements and the remaining 6.6 % no women and men seen. Security presence were reported near 49.3% of polling stations, though no widespread intimidation was documented.
- **Voting Process:** Priority access was given to pregnant women, nursing mothers, elderly voters, and persons with disabilities at 92.5% of the polling stations observed. However, voter registration issues prevented some women from voting: 7.4% of polling stations reported missing names; and 2.2% of polling stations recorded mismatches between digital and paper rolls. The voting environment was peaceful at 97.8% of polling stations, though three cases of psychological violence against women were documented.
- **Women's Participation:** Only 24.3% of polling stations had women as chairpersons of the NEBE officials, highlighting a gender gap in leadership roles. Women with disabilities served as polling staff at 13.6% of polling stations. Women were present as observers, party agents, or journalists in most stations, but 27.9% of polling stations had no women in oversight roles. Women journalists were present at only 11% of polling stations. Access to polling stations was reported as equally easy for men and women at 77.2% of polling stations, though in 19.1% of polling stations access was easier for men.

**2. Polling Station Closing and Vote Counting**

- **Closing Procedures:** All voters in queue at closing time were permitted to cast ballots. No voter was denied the right to vote at polling stations observed.
- **Vote Counting:** At the time of counting, EWLA observers remained were present at only 41 polling stations (out of the total 136). Observers reported that counting proceeded peacefully and transparently at these observed polling stations. Party candidates and agents were present at 68.3% of the observed polling stations. No

authorized stakeholders were denied access, though one EWLA observer reported being denied permission to remain during counting.

- **Women's Safety:** No women party agents, candidates, observers, or journalists encountered violence during closing or counting.
- **Complaints:** No formal complaints were submitted at the 41 polling stations observed

**Conclusion**

EWLA's preliminary findings indicate that Ethiopia's 7th General Election was conducted in a generally orderly, peaceful, and transparent manner at deployed and observed polling stations Women's participation was visible, supported by priority voting measures and active involvement as voters, officials, and observers. However, persistent gaps remain in women's representation in leadership roles, accessibility for vulnerable groups, and the handling of voter registration errors.

The overall environment at the observed polling stations was inclusive and free from systemic irregularities, though isolated incidents of intimidation and logistical challenges such as heavy rain highlight areas for improvement. Critical incident received from deployed observers are still under verification to substantiate the data.

As noted in the introduction, this statement is a preliminary one. EWLA will continue to observe the post-election environment and will issue a comprehensive final report with full data analysis of the observation findings at future date. EWLA's work contributes evidence-based recommendations to strengthen accountability, promote inclusivity, and ensure democratic elections where women can participate as voters, candidates, officials, and leaders without fear of violence. EWLA commends the people of Ethiopia for stepping out to exercise their constitutional rights to elect their leaders. EWLA further express gratitude to its volunteered observers for their service to the country.