

# Election Commission of Bhutan



**ELECTION COMMISSION OF BHUTAN**

Post Box 2008,  
Thimphu: Bhutan.

Phone: (00975) 2 334 851/2

Fax: (00975) 2 334763

E-mail: [cec@election-bhutan.org.bt](mailto:cec@election-bhutan.org.bt)

Visit us at: [www.election-bhutan.org.bt](http://www.election-bhutan.org.bt)

**Guidelines for the Conduct of the Common  
Forum for Election Campaign,  
2015**

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**Visit us at:** [www.election-bhutan.org.bt](http://www.election-bhutan.org.bt)  
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## **Guidelines for the Conduct of the Common Forum for Election Campaign, 2015**

The Election Commission of Bhutan to *uphold* the right of the electorate to be well-informed on the Political Parties and/or Candidates to make a meaningful choice in an Election; *facilitate* Political Parties and/or Candidates to effectively communicate and present their manifestoes to their electorates; and *reduce* the necessity to call public meetings in a *Chiwog*, *Gewog* or *Dzongkhag Thromde* by each Party/Candidate separately; minimize inconvenience to voters of attending repeated sessions; *eliminating* the necessity of entertaining the audience by the Parties and Candidates, hereby adopts these *Guidelines for the Conduct of the Common Forum for Election Campaign, 2015*.

### **1. Short Title, Extent, Application and Commencement**

1.1. These Guidelines shall:

- 1.1.1. Be called the *Guidelines for the Conduct of the Common Forum for Election Campaign, 2015*;
- 1.1.2. Be applicable for conduct of Parliamentary and Local Government Elections in the Kingdom; and
- 1.1.3. Come into force with effect from 25<sup>th</sup> of June 2015 Corresponding to 9<sup>th</sup> Day of the 5<sup>th</sup> Month of the Wood Female Sheep Year of the Bhutanese Calendar.

### **2. Legal Provisions**

2.1. Section 267 of the Election Act 2008 provides that:

“Every Candidate and registered Political Party shall, subject to any requirements imposed by this Act or under any law, be free to conduct an election campaign in the manner deemed appropriate by them.”

2.2. Section 294 of the Election Act of the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2008 provides that:

“Every Political Party, Candidate and their representatives at all forums and at all times shall avoid defamatory and derogatory attacks on rival parties or individual personalities through any form of communication and avoid the use of inflammatory language, provocative actions, images or manifestations that incite violence, hatred or intimidation against another party or Candidate or any person or group of persons.”

### 3. Definition

- 3.1. *Common Forum* means a facility created by election authorities in a *Chiwog/Gewog/Thromde* to provide equal and cost-effective opportunity to a Political Party whose Letter of Intent has been accepted in the case of the Primary Round, or Candidate whose nomination has been accepted in the case of the General or National Council or Local Government Elections, to address the electorate at a pre-determined time and pre-designated venue for the purpose of electioneering reducing the need for separate meetings or door to door campaigning.
- 3.2. *Chief Election Officer* means the Head of the Department of Elections of the Election Commission of Bhutan.
- 3.3. *Commission* means the Election Commission of Bhutan formed in accordance with the Article 24 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan;
- 3.4. Election Act means the Election Act of the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2008;
- 3.5. Electoral Laws means the Election Act of the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2008, Public Election Fund Act of the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2008 and the National Referendum Act of the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2008.

- 3.6. *Party* means a group of Registered Voters which has registered as a Political Party to contest National Assembly Elections of the Parliament in Bhutan with the Election Commission of Bhutan.

#### **4. Common Forum for Election Campaign**

- 4.1. There shall be at least one Common Forum organized in every *Gewog* and *Thromde* during the National Council Elections at which a Candidate whose nomination has been accepted may address the electorate.
- 4.2. There shall be at least one Common Forum organized in every *Gewog* and *Thromde* during a Primary Round at which an authorized representative of a Political Party whose Letter of Intent has been accepted may address the electorate.
- 4.3. There shall be at least one Common Forum organized in every *Gewog* and *Thromde* during the General Elections at which a Candidate whose nomination has been accepted may address the electorate.
- 4.4. There shall be at least one Common Forum organized in every *Chiwog* and *Thromde* during the Local Government Elections at which a Candidate whose nomination has been accepted may address the electorate.

Provided that a Candidate for the post of a *Gup* and *Mangmi* may participate at the Common Forum in all the *Chiwogs* of the respective *Gewog* and Candidates for *Thrompon* and *Thromde Thuemi* may participate in all the *Thromde Tshogpa Demkhongs* of the respective *Thromde*.

- 4.5. The Common Forums is mandatory for all the Political Parties/ Candidates.**



## **5. Invitation**

- 5.1. A concerned Returning Officer shall invite a Candidate whose nomination has been accepted to contest the *National Council Elections*, to address the Forum.
- 5.2. A concerned Returning Officer shall invite a Political Party whose Letter of Intent is accepted to contest the *Primary Round* to address the Common Forum.
- 5.3. A concerned Returning Officer shall invite a Candidate whose nomination has been accepted to contest the *General Elections* to address the Common Forum.
- 5.4. A concerned Returning Officer shall invite a Candidate whose nomination has been accepted to contest the Local Government Elections to address the Common Forum.
- 5.5. The invitation to the Common Forum shall be issued by the Returning Officer.

## **6. The Order of Speakers**

- 6.1. The order of the Speakers at a Common Forum shall normally be in alphabetical order of the family/second name or the name in case of a single name. However, Parties or Candidates at a Common Forum can take unanimous decision to adopt an alternative method acceptable and agreeable to all in the presence of election authorities.
- 6.2. Each Speaker shall be allocated equal time within which he/she is expected to address.

## **7. Organization Responsibility**

- 7.1. The Returning Officer/Assistant Returning Officer with full support of the respective Chief/Assistant Election Coordinators shall be responsible for the arrangement of the Common Forum.

## **8. Schedule of the Common Forum**

- 8.1. The Concerned Returning Officer and Assist Chief Election Coordinator shall discuss the Common Forum Schedule in a meeting specially convened for the purpose with the Party/Candidate or their authorized representative immediately after the last day of withdrawal.
- 8.2. The Concerned Returning Officer shall officially intimate the final Schedule to the authorized Party representative/Candidate with a copy endorsed to the Chief Electoral Officer, ECB Head Office, Chief/Deputy and Assistant Election Coordinator and the Security Coordinator.
- 8.3. The Concerned Election Coordinator shall be responsible to ensure that the Schedules received from the Returning Officers are appropriately communicated to the electorate.
- 8.4. The Concerned Election Coordinator shall assist the Returning Officer in making the arrangements in the respective *Chiwogs/Thromde*.

## **9. Conduct of the Common Forum**

- 9.1. The Returning Officer or an authorized officer shall at the start of the Common Forum:
  - 9.1.1. Make a brief introduction on the purpose;
  - 9.1.2. Remind the Political Parties/ Candidates to strictly abide by the Election Code of Conduct and in particular to present their own manifestoes and not engage in defamatory, derogatory or hateful communication;
  - 9.1.3. On the sequence of the speaking order and time duration for each speaker; and
  - 9.1.4. Request the audience to maintain silence, listen attentively and come to their own conclusions on which to base their choice, exercised through their sacred and secret ballot to be cast on the Poll Day.

- 9.2. The concerned Returning Officer/Authorised Officer shall brief all gathered at the venue that no untoward conduct, mischief or bad behaviour shall be tolerated at a Common Forum as the sole purpose of the Forum is to provide the Party/Candidate to communicate the campaign manifesto and the participants to listen and understand the same.
- 9.3. A Political Party/Candidate/representative must refrain from defamatory and derogatory attacks on a rival Party or Candidate and avoid the use of inflammatory language, provocative actions, images or manifestations that incite violence, hatred or intimidation against another Party or Candidate or any person or group of persons.
- 9.4. A Party Representative/Candidate shall be ushered to the podium upon his/her name being announced and shall exit the area of the rostrum upon completion of his/her speech in the allotted time.
- 9.5. A Political Party/Candidate or supporters shall not be allowed to transport or arrange transport for any person to or from the Forum.
- 9.6. A Political Party/Candidate or supporters shall be prohibited from inducing or coercing anyone to attend or not attend a Forum.
- 9.7. A Representative of a Political Party or Candidate shall not be referred with the title of post held by him/her except as Speaker, Candidate or Party Representative.

## **10. No Entertainment and/or Refreshments**

- 10.1. A Party or Candidate shall not be allowed to arrange entertainment and/or refreshments to electorate or for themselves except to the extent of courtesy extended to them by the election authorities as a necessity for effective performance of the task at hand.
- 10.2. A Voter shall not expect or accept any refreshment or treats of any form particularly from a Party or Candidate or their supporters.

10.3. The concerned Returning Officer shall however fill in any free time to brief electorates on election related information necessary to be communicated to the general public while being strictly neutral as regards the contestants or their manifestoes.

## **11. Peace and Security**

11.1. An Election Authority responsible to conduct the Common Forum has the full authority under the Electoral Laws to detain or restrain any trouble creator at a Common Forum up to the duration of the Election Campaign Period.

11.2. The Security Coordinator shall be responsible to ensure maintenance of law and order at each Forum by making all the necessary security arrangements.

11.3. A Political Party or Candidate shall be held fully answerable for any untoward situation at a Common Forum if, based on reasonable grounds, is found to have been caused by their supporters.

## **12. General**

12.1. The National Observer shall observe the proceedings of the Common Forum and submit his/her Observation to the Commission as per the reporting procedures prescribed in the *Election Observation Guidelines of the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2015*.

12.2. A Political Party or Candidate may conduct separate public meetings and/or door to door campaign with prior approval of the respective Returning Officer as may be permissible under the Electoral Laws and the Notifications of the Election Commission of Bhutan.

## **13. Penal Provision**

13.1. Any fraudulent act in the process shall be dealt in accordance with the Electoral and any other relevant Laws of the Kingdom of Bhutan.

## **14. Power of the Commission to Issue Instructions and Directions**

14.1. The Commission may issue instructions and directions:

14.1.1. For the clarification of any of the provisions of these Guidelines;

14.1.2. For the removal of any difficulty which may arise in relation to the implementation of any such provisions; and

14.1.3. In relation to any matter with respect to the Forum for which these Guidelines make insufficient provision and clarification is necessary in the opinion of the Commission.

## **15. Authority of Interpretation and Amendment**

15.1. The Commission shall be the authority competent to interpret the clauses of these Guidelines.

15.2. The Commission shall have the power to amend by way of addition, variation, or repeal the provisions of these Guidelines.

Done under the seal of the Election Commission of Bhutan on this 25<sup>th</sup> of June 2015 Corresponding to the 9<sup>th</sup> Day of the 5<sup>th</sup> Month of the Wood Female Sheep Year in the Bhutanese Calendar.



**Election Commissioner**



**Election Commissioner**



**Chief Election Commissioner**



**Common Forum**

To

..... (Candidate/Political Party)

..... *Demkhong*

..... *Dzongkhag*

Dear Sir/Madam,

This is to inform you that the Common Forum for Election Campaign for the Parties/Candidates contesting the ..... Elections shall be conducted as follows:

- 1. Venue: .....
- 2. Time: .....
- 3. Date: .....

The said meeting shall be conducted as per the *Guidelines for the Conduct of the Common Forum for Election Campaign, 2015*. In particular you may like to note that you should focus your presentation on your manifesto and refrain from passing negative remarks on other candidates, providing transport services to voters, and/or serving food/drinks/entertainment even for yourself except as may be served by the election authority.

( )

**Returning Officer**

..... *Demkhong*

..... *Dzongkhag*

Date: .....



**Returning Officer Form No. 18**

Received by (to be noted on office copy):

..... (Name and Signature)

..... (Date)