



August 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023

**Attention All Editors**

**For Immediate Release**

**Chief Election Officer responds to Opposition Leader’s request for an investigation into “special ballot irregularities”**

Fern Narcis-Scope, the Chief Election Officer at the Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC) has officially responded to a request made by the Opposition Leader, Kamla Persad-Bissessar for an investigation into “special ballot irregularities”.

In her response to the Opposition Leader, Narcis-Scope explained that there was no provision in the Election Rules for the sealing of ballot boxes at special polling stations established by the Commission, in accordance with Election Rule 76 of the Representation of the People Act, Chap. 2:01. Narcis-Scope advised that it had become the practice for Special Presiding Officers to use ballot boxes to transport the sealed envelopes but there is no requirement in law, to either use ballot boxes or to seal them. The broken seals were, in fact part of a previous process utilized at the Special Polling Station and was in no way part of the process being witnessed at Queen’s Hall.

Narcis-Scope added that her investigations revealed that as required by law, all the special envelopes were sealed by the Special Presiding Officer and for matters of safety and security in the transportation, all boxes were locked. Further, at the sorting exercise at Queen’s Hall, all the special envelopes were displayed as being sealed and intact. Narcis-Scope noted that the fact that two (2) ballot boxes were not sealed does not impact the outcome of the election in any given electoral district as suggested by the Opposition Leader.

In the second complaint made by the Opposition Leader that the ballots cast at the Sangre Grande Police Station were not packaged according to the standard procedure so that the names of some electors could be viewed by the EBC staff who were responsible for sorting the votes and sending them to the respective Electoral Districts.

Narcis-Scope said her investigations revealed that the eleven (11) covering envelopes with the declaration of identity of the special electors as required by



Election Rule 71 were placed in the ballot box at that location, which was then locked and sealed. A proper record was kept of the districts that the ballots were cast for via a Statement of the Contents of the Special Ballot Box in accordance with Election Rule 84 (2) and was duly signed by the Special Presiding Officer. This Statement was also shown to witnesses present at the sorting exercise.

In closing, the Chief Election Officer noted that it was regrettable that notwithstanding the training provided there was a deviation from the approved procedure, this deviation however, did not compromise the integrity of the process as all staff of the Commission designated to participate in special poll proceedings are required to take declarations of secrecy and further, the identity of persons who have cast their ballots is an essential component of the electoral process.

The Chief Election Officer received an official letter from the Opposition Leader calling for an investigation into the aforementioned claims on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> August, 2023. These claims were made by members of the UNC, who were invited to witness the sorting of special envelopes for the 2023 Local Government Elections at 1:00 p.m. on Friday 11<sup>th</sup> August, 2023 at the Helen May Johnstone Conference Room, Queen's Hall.

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