



NATIONAL ELECTION WATCH (NEW)

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Freetown, 7th March, 2018: Statement on the Voting Process

National Election Watch (NEW) has been observing the 2018 general elections in Sierra Leone. NEW has deployed 506 trained and accredited priority observers to a random sample of 506 polling stations and 507 supervisors across the country to provide timely and accurate information on the conduct of the elections. 97% of the 506 sample observers have submitted reports on the set-up, opening and voting processes. Percentages reported do not cover all 11,122 polling stations but are statistically representative of the country as a whole and do provide reliable and credible data on the process.

Preliminary findings on the process:

Set up and Opening of Polling Station

Based on reports from 97% of the 506 sampled polling stations, observers recorded early arrival of NEC officials and opening of polls. Between 7:00am to 7:30am, 81% of polling stations had opened. However, 11% opened between 10:00 to 10:30am. Observers also reported availability of equipment and election materials at the commencement of the elections. In 94% of polling stations observed, NEW observers reported that all sensitive materials (including the ballots, ballot stamp, booths and screens, indelible ink, and voter list were available). However, 4% reported that there were not enough voting screens to guarantee the secrecy of the vote.

80% of observers reported that polling stations were suitably located. 4% noted that polling stations were not easily accessible to people with disabilities. A further 4% reported that polling stations were far to reach.

In 93% of polling stations, there was a presence of at least one female NEC staff. At all polling stations observed, agents of political parties were present and 94% had at least three party agents.

Voting:

Inking of voters:

Overall, voters were properly inked after casting their ballots as reported by 88% of observers.

Campaigning at polling stations:

93% of observers reported that campaigning did not take place near polling stations. However, 2% of observers reported that there was active campaigning taking place around polling stations. Also 5% of observers recorded that there were campaign posters near polling stations.

Explanation on Voting Procedures:

Generally, voting procedures were properly explained to voters as recorded by 87% of observers. At the same time only 3% reported that People with Disabilities (PWD), pregnant women, lactating mothers and the elderly were given preference to vote.

Orderly Voting:

65% of observers reported that voting was conducted in an orderly manner while 28% recorded over-crowding at polling stations but the NEC officials were able to manage the situation. In 5% of polling stations, NEW's observers reported confusion of voting at polling stations while 2% reported that NEC officials totally lost control of the process.

Presence of other observers at polling stations apart from NEW:

58% of observers reported that there was at least one observer other than NEW presence.

Number of persons waiting in line at 5:00 PM:

44.4% of observers reported that at least one person was waiting in line by 5:00PM.

Was everyone in line allowed to vote by 5PM?

91% of observers reported that those in the line by 5 PM were allowed to vote.

People with Disabilities voting after 1:30 PM:

At polling stations observed, observers noted the presence of People with Disabilities voting after 1:30 Pm indicating their continuous participation in the process.

Emerging Concerns:

Intimidation: NEW is concerned with reports of intimidation of voters by the presence of political parties' stewards in polling stations and in other instances by security forces. NEW is further concerned about the widely publicized incident of police intrusion at the tallying center of the SLPP located at Marjay Center. NEW subsequently verified the intrusion of the police in the operation of the SLPP Tallying Center. This development could undermine the integrity of the electoral process and threaten the peace.

Election Logistics: Due to logistical challenges elections in the following places were suspended:

In Kenema City, at Polling Center 2239 wrong polling materials were sent and this led to the suspension of voting.

In Pujehun District, Councilor election in Ward 353

In Kenema District Councilor election in Ward 55

National Election Watch (NEW) is a Coalition of Local and International Organizations in Sierra Leone with a common objective of supporting free, fair and peaceful elections. NEW will continue to observe the Electoral processes and report accordingly.

NEW is part of the Standing Together for Democracy Consortium supported by UKAID. Further support is also received from the European Union Delegation in Sierra Leone and the Open Society Initiative of West Africa (OSIWA) to enhance technology in Elections Observation.