

**PRESS RELEASE RE PROPOSED NON-PARTISAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS
ISSUED BY OPPOSITION PARTIES IN SIERRA LEONE
MONDAY 7TH DECEMBER 2020**

We are aware that the Minister of Local Government and Rural Development, during the Government's Weekly Press Briefing on Thursday 26th November 2020 and other media engagements, informed the general public that Cabinet has approved a new National Decentralization Policy. **We the undersigned political parties are vehemently opposed to the introduction of non-partisan local council elections in Sierra Leone** and are of the opinion that the proposal should be abandoned with immediate effect.

We take this opportunity to hereby inform the general public and the international community that:

1. None of our political parties were informed or consulted with respect to the development of this National Decentralization Policy prior to the public announcement made by the said Minister.
2. Furthermore, none of the undersigned political parties are in receipt of either a draft or the final copy of the new National Decentralization Policy that the Minister of Local Government says has been approved by Cabinet. We consider it to be wholly unacceptable that our knowledge of the content of this critical policy is limited to key clauses outlined in the Press Statements made by the Minister of Local Government and Rural Development and members of his review team and in related statements circulated on social media.
3. A key clause of the new National Decentralization Policy that has been trumpeted in the media by the Minister of Local Government and Rural Development states that: "a person seeking to be a member of a local council as an elected councillor **shall present himself to the electorate as an independent candidate; Councils are going to be non-partisan**";
4. Having engaged elected representatives within the Local Councils about the consultation process conducted by the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, the feedback from the Local Councils is that there was overwhelming rejection of the proposal of non-partisan elections by the local council stakeholders who were consulted by the Ministry of Local Government and their review team.

We the undersigned political parties are of the view that the introduction of this clause into the National Decentralization Policy is a direct assault on Sierra Leone's multi-party democracy and a calculated move by the current SLPP government to illegitimately consolidate power in all Local Councils and to eliminate political opposition.

The existing Local Government Act 2004 clearly states in Part III, paragraph 4 (4) "A person seeking to be a member of a local council as an elected Councillor may present himself to the electorate **as a candidate of a political party or as an independent candidate**". There is therefore already provision in the Local Government Act 2004 for candidates to run for office


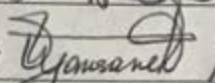
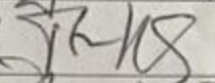
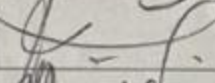
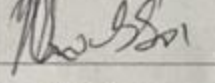
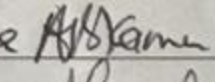
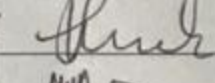
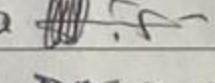
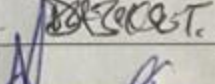
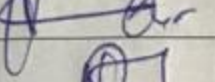
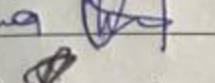
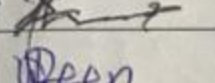
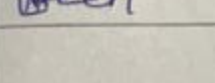
in the Local Councils as independents. The Government's attempt to introduce legislation that makes being an independent candidate for local council elections mandatory is unacceptable for the following non-exhaustive list of reasons:

1. The Sierra Leone 1991 Constitution is founded on the principles of multi-party democracy and the right of association. Section 15(b) and Section 26 of the 1991 Constitution guarantee all Sierra Leoneans the right and freedom to assemble and to associate. The introduction of mandatory non-partisan local elections is contrary to both the constitutional principles and the constitutional rights of the citizens of Sierra Leone. The constitution cannot be overridden by subsequent legislation. The constitution is supreme.
2. The introduction of non-partisan elections will go against the provisions of Section 35(1) of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone, which categorically states the role of political parties with regards to supporting the less wealthy (including women, youth and the disabled) during Local Government elections. Poorer citizens will therefore be excluded from participating in what should be the most inclusive election within our multi-party democracy should they be unable to pay nomination fees and campaign costs. The educational criteria included in the policy contradicts the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone.
3. It is clear that non-partisan local council elections will in practice be subject to major interference from the ruling government. Recent examples of the overt interference of government in non-partisan, non-political elections, include: (i) the crowning ceremony at Victoria Park in 2018 of SLPP appointed market chairmen and chairwomen attended by the SLPP Western Area Regional Chairman; (ii) the interference of the Deputy Minister of Youth who, in an emergency meeting at the Sweissy Grounds in November 2018 personally pronounced that the then executive of Sweissy Jewellers Organisation was immediately dissolved and then proceeded to direct and influence new elections; (iii) the extensive involvement and interference by the Deputy Minister of Local Government and other government officials in the election of the Chairlady of the Gbense Market Women's Association in Kono District in 2018.
4. Additionally, in the absence of political party participation, the process of shortlisting potential candidates will be transferred from the political parties to the ruling government which will enable them to ensure that only candidates that are favoured by the government are allowed to contest. An election ballot paper cannot accommodate 100 candidates so if 100 candidates decide that they want to run for Mayor of Freetown, there will need to be a process of shortlisting those candidates. In the current multi-party democratic system, the political parties play a major role in shortlisting candidates within their party through the award of symbols. In the proposed non-partisan system, that process will move to the ruling government (potentially through the establishment of a commission appointed by the President and influenced by the ruling government).

5. With the level of interference demonstrated in the elections of ostensibly non-political organisations highlighted in paragraph 2 above, it is clear that the process of shortlisting candidates will be used by the ruling government to handpick and give advantage to pro-ruling party supporters.

6. The proposed policy will unduly influence the ongoing review of the electoral laws.

We the undersigned political parties totally and unequivocally reject the introduction of non-partisan local council elections and hold the view that Government of Sierra Leone should abandon the proposal and focus on addressing more pressing issues, such as quality education, economic growth and job creation, that are affecting the daily lives of the citizens of Sierra Leone.

#	PARTY	NAME	SIGNATURE	DESIGNATION
1	U.P	Femi Claudius		Chairperson
2	A.P.C	OSMAN FODAY YANSANEH		NATIONAL SEC. GENERAL
3	C.D.P.	Gibil Thyllah		National Chairman
4	NURP	Jonathan Sady		Chairman
5	ADP	N'fajie Kabba		Dept Chairman
6	PDP	Alhaji Ben Kamara		Nat Sec General
7	CYC	Tamba R. Sandi		Nat. C/ma
8	PLP	Nabieu Musa Kamara		Nat Chairman
9	MGC	Dr Dennis Bright		Med. Chairman
10	N.P.D.	Wadi-Williams		NAT. CHAIR
11	UNPP	Osman Koroma		NSG
12	RUF	ISAAC T. MORGAN		Nat Chairman
13	WDM	Halima Dean		Acting leader & C/psn
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