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## **PRE-ELECTION ASSESSMENT REPORT AHEAD OF BYE-ELECTIONS IN CONSTITUENCY 010, WARD 012 IN KAILAHUN AND WARD 192 IN KAMBIA DISTRICT**

**INTIMIDATION, HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE LEAVE ONE DEAD IN CONSTITUENCY 010 KAILAHUN DISTRICT WHILST OTHER ELECTION LOCATIONS ARE RELATIVELY CALM: NEW PRE-ELECTION ASSESSMENT REVEALS**

**NATIONAL ELECTION WATCH – SIERRA LEONE**

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## BACKGROUND



**O**n the 27th February 2021, National Electoral Commission (NEC) will conduct Bye-elections for Member of Parliament (MP) for Constituency 010 and councilor for Ward 012 in Kailahun District. On the 6<sup>th</sup> March 2021, there will also be an election in Ward 192 in Kambia District. All 3 Bye-Elections are occasioned by the death of the substantive MP and Councilors.

In line with its mandate of strengthening free, fair, and credible elections, NEW is currently observing the pre-election atmosphere and held stakeholder engagements in the 3 election locations. The aim is to assess the pre-election context to ascertain whether the conditions are conducive to credible elections in line with the legal framework. The team observed the political atmosphere, gauged citizens' readiness to participate in the upcoming polls, determined the preparedness of security forces, and assessed the overall preparedness of Elections Management Bodies (EMBs) ahead of the elections slated for 27<sup>th</sup> February and 6<sup>th</sup> March 2021, respectively.

The need for an independent opinion on the conduct of these elections cannot be overemphasized, as elections and the political environment in recent times are becoming too contentious with patterns of violence, intimidation, and harassment. Stakeholders must take strides to ensure that all players and stakeholders in the process execute their roles and responsibilities in accordance with the law. NEW believes that if actions are taken from the evidence garnered in the Pre-election Assessment Mission; it will foster sanity and contribute to a credible process and outcome.

Therefore, this report will highlight the pre-election issues with an analysis of pertinent governance issues and peaceful coexistence in the communities where these elections will occur. The report's overall objective is to provide insights into critical issues to be addressed in advance of the 27<sup>th</sup> February and 6<sup>th</sup> March polls.

## **ELECTION MANAGEMENT BODIES (EMBs)**



### **Findings**

NEC, in line with its mandate, held stakeholder meetings in the Wards and Constituency. The Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC) held a stakeholder meeting on 18th February 2021 in Daru. In this meeting, updates were shared on the preparedness for the bye-election in Constituency 010 by the Office of National Security (ONS), Sierra Leone Police (SLP), Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF), National Electoral Commission (NEC), National Commission for Democracy (NCD) and NEW. PPRC continues its engagement on 19th February 2021 in Constituency 010 to listen to key stakeholders, including the candidates, and admonish them for a violent free election process.

## **CONSTITUENCY 010: KAILAHUN DISTRICT**

### **Findings**

- 3 Candidates are contesting the Elections. They are from the All Peoples Congress Party (APC), The Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP), and an Independent candidate.
- The relationship between candidates and supporters of the 2 political parties has not exhibited tension and violence, but the relationship between the SLPP candidate, their supporters, and the Independent Candidate and his supporters is tense, hostile, intimidating, and has resulted in political violence.
- Attempts were made to prevent the Independent Candidate's nomination using the violation of COVID-19 rules of social distancing and use of facemask. The District COVID-19 Emergency Response Center (DiCOVERC) Coordinator allegedly did this in connivance with some police personnel and ONS staff. The allegation was that the Independent Candidate rode two to a bike and without facemasks. The Independent Candidate and 6 of

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his supporters were beaten and detained at the Kailahun Police Station. It was further alleged that the aim was to keep the Independent Candidate in custody till after the nomination. The District Election Manager of NEC's intervention to allow his participation in the nomination training was futile. However, his release in time for the nomination training was made possible by the Local Unit Commander (LUC) in Kailahun Town after 350,000 Le (Three Hundred and Fifty Thousand Leones) was paid as fine for all 6 detainees.

- The Electoral environments in which the APC party and SLPP party candidates reside are calm and peaceful, with the community people going about their everyday business. The community in which the Independent Candidate lives is tensed, and the community gripped with fear. Some of the community people are fleeing into the bushes.
- A boy between ages 18 and 20, nephew of the Independent Candidate, was murdered in Gbahama, the Village of the Independent candidate, on Tuesday 17th February 2021, on the SLPP candidate's campaign day.
- There was armed police deployment in the SLPP candidate's compound in Bauhiun Village, PejeBongre Chiefdom, while the same was not seen in the APC and Independent candidates' residences.
- The Independent Candidate has refused to make a public appearance at meetings called by the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) and the NEC.
- The Independent Candidate agreed to meet with National Election Watch (NEW) at the Worroma Court Barray, giving details of his ordeal.
- The absence of Intra-party democracy and the award of symbols is a major cause for dissatisfaction, disaffection, and violence.
- The Paramount Chief (PC) of Peje Bongre Chiefdom has publicly associated with the SLPP campaign activities. The SLPP held a public gathering in Mamboma Village Court Barray, where the PC resides. The meeting, which over one hundred people attended, with the PC on the high table, was held on the Independent Candidate's campaign date. NEC intervened for them to respect the Campaign calendar, and the Police were alerted to take action.
- Some constituency members are against the SLPP candidate's candidature with the explanation that she is a Northerner and does not speak any of the languages in the constituency.
- The importation of thugs called the 'Benghazi Unit' from Kailahun Town into the constituency was prevalent.
- The Independent Candidate does not trust the Police as an independent authority in the electoral process. As at the time of the pre-election assessment, no arrests were made in relation to the killing of the youth, but his supporters have been arrested and in police custody.
- The Independent Candidate claimed that he feared for his life and did not attend the first Stakeholders Meeting organized by NEC and sent his brother to represent him. The PC and SLPP supporters believe this is a case of impersonation, and the Police must take action against the Independent Candidate.

## WARD 012: KAILAHUN DISTRICT

### Findings

- 2 Political Parties (APC and SLPP) are contesting for the councilor seat.
- The candidates and their supporters displayed high levels of political tolerance.
- The APC and SLPP candidates amicably resolved an issue of tearing a candidate's campaign posters.
- The Bike Riders had maintained a neutral position providing commercial services to both Political Parties on request.

## WARD 192 KAMBIA DISTRICT



### Findings

- 3 Political Parties are contesting the elections; APC, National Grand Coalition (NGC), and SLPP.
- The majority of the targeted stakeholders see the elections as a platform where people have the right to belong to different political parties and considering the family relationships among the three candidates; they have demonstrated high tolerance levels so far -noting that a win by any of the Candidates is a win for the entire community.
- Community awareness on the Bye-election is, however, relatively low. Only 1 Stakeholder Meeting has so far been held in the Ward.
- People are concerned about the rules regarding lost voter ID cards, and since it is a border area, there is a high risk of potential infiltration and impersonation.
- The 3 Political Parties, PC, and Community People are averse to rumors of the importation of thugs into the Ward. Political parties and stakeholders have agreed to work in earnest to prevent the influx of people and thugs into their community in advance of the polls.
- The electoral environment is relatively calm and peaceful so far.

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NEW acknowledges the proactive move of the PPRC in engaging critical stakeholders in Kailahun District and Constituency 010 to ensure that calm prevails ahead of the bye-elections of 27th February 2021. NEW equally recognizes the effort and intervention of the District Election Manager of NEC and the Local Unit Commander of the Kailahun police station for the release of the Independent Candidate to participate in the nomination process. NEW also commends the political tolerance displayed in Ward 012 and Ward 192 by the Political Parties and their supporters on the one hand and the Wards' residents. NEW condemns the on-going harassment, intimidation, and violence in Constituency 010.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **NEW Recommends that:**

1. State institutions, Agencies, and Traditional Authorities like DICOVERC, ONS, and Paramount Chiefs must refrain from using their mandate/ authority as an outlet for undue advantage in party politics and elections.
2. The National COVID-19 Emergency Response Center (NaCOVERC) must publicize the COVID-19 fines to avoid using such penalties as an avenue for extortion and political party gains.
3. The SLP must be reminded of its constitutional role to protect the entire citizenry of Sierra Leone. Police protection to one Candidate to the disadvantage of others is discriminatory. The SLP should be neutral and impartial in enforcing laws and policies and create a level playing field for all political actors.
4. NEW calls for the speedy investigation into the death of the youth.
5. The Police must investigate the sponsors of political thuggery, and they must face the full penalty of the law regardless of political affiliation.
6. Institutions like PPRC, National Commission for Democracy (NCD), National Council for Civic Education and Development (NaCCED), and civil society must work towards robust civic and political education, especially on the dangers of Ethnic and Tribal Politics.
7. NEC should inform the public of the voting procedures for voters who have lost their ID cards ahead of the polls.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Two teams from NEW embarked on the Pre-Elections Assessment Mission; one group was deployed in Kailahun District, and the other team in Kambia District. The Kailahun District group comprised members from the Secretariat, the Regional and District leadership of NEW, while the group for Kambia comprised the Regional and District leadership of NEW. Both teams met stakeholders, including Youth leaders, Bike Riders, Women's Leaders, Religious leaders, Local Authorities, and Political Party candidates. The teams also engaged the security, including ONS, SLP and Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF), NEC, The Political Parties PPRC and NCD. NEW had a radio discussion on SLBC radio prior to the engagements to inform the public about the purpose of the Pre- Election Assessment.

## **Targeted Communities**

NEW targeted the following communities in the Pre-Election Assessment.

### **Constituency 010**

PejeBongre Chiefdom – Bauhiun, Mamboma and  
Penguia Chiefdom – Woroma, Sandaru

### **Ward 012-**

Mandu Chiefdom - Mobai Town

### **Ward 192**

Khonimaka Chiefdom – Turaya, Konta and Kabaya

### **Areas of focus**

The pre-election assessment focused on the following;

- The knowledge of the people about the upcoming elections and preparation for the elections.
- Citizens/Stakeholder perception about the elections.
- Citizens/Stakeholder concerns ahead of the elections
- Citizens/Stakeholder expectations for a peaceful outcome of the elections.
- Citizens/Stakeholders expected roles to ensure the peaceful conduct of the elections.
- Election management/security preparedness ahead of the elections (early warning and conflict prevention).
- Level of engagement with the community and candidates by Election Management Bodies (EMBs) and security ahead of polling day.

*The National Election Watch (NEW) is a coalition of over 400 Civil Society Organizations, National and International Non- Governmental Organizations, observing, monitoring, and strengthening public elections processes. NEW collaborates with EMBs and other stakeholders to ensure free, fair, and credible elections in Sierra Leone. The coalition is neutral, independent, and works to promote citizens' participation in electoral processes. NEW has established structures at national, regional, district, and chiefdom levels that position the institution to observe and monitor national public elections.*

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*This publication's contents are the sole responsibility of National Election Watch – Sierra Leone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.*

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