



NATIONAL ELECTION WATCH (NEW)

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Press Statement for Immediate Release

Freetown, 1st March 2021: NEC Conducts Peaceful Bye-elections in Constituency 010 and Ward 012 in Kailahun District after Campaigns Marred by Political Violence and Intimidation

National Electoral Commission (NEC) peacefully conducts bye-elections in Constituency 010 and Ward 012 on 27th February 2021 after campaigns that were marred by political violence, intimidation and intolerance resulting in the death of an 18-20 year old boy in Constituency 010. The peaceful conduct of election on polling day is due largely to stakeholder engagements by various institutions and organizations including NEC and Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC), involving the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) represented by the Inspector General of Police, the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF), National Commission for Democracy (NCD), Office of National Security (ONS), Human Rights Commission Sierra Leone (HRCSL), Local Authorities and the candidates and their supporters. During these engagements, all players and stakeholders made commitments for a peaceful electoral environment. In addition to these engagements, NEW conducted a pre-election assessment and shared its findings with all Election Management Bodies (EMBs) and other relevant stakeholders.

NEW observed the entire process, including opening, polling, closing and counting, tallying and the announcement of provisional results in both locations. NEW recruited, trained and deployed observers in all the 47 polling stations in Constituency 010 and in the 7 polling centres in Ward 012. NEW also deployed 2 teams of supervisors in both Constituency 010 and Ward 012 and roving observers in Constituency 010. On Election Day, all observers texted findings from the field to the situation room making it possible for real time response to incidences.

Findings

- Most of the polling stations in both Constituency 010 and Ward 012 opened on time.
- Voter turnout was relatively high at 56.9% and 55.6% in Constituency 010 and Ward 012 respectively.
- Political party and Independent candidate's agents were present in all the polling stations.
- NEC staff in the polling stations was mainly youth and there were more males than females.
- Police presence was visible in all polling centres.
- Hand-washing and face masks compliance was visible in almost all polling stations.
- There were no thermometers in most of the polling stations to test temperature of voters in Constituency 010 whilst there were thermometers in all polling stations observed in Ward 012.
- Other observers on polling day included; PPRC, SEND Sierra Leone, British High Commission, Election Conflict Prevention and Mediation Group and the media.
- The Chief Electoral Commissioner, NEC Commissioner for the Eastern Region and other senior NEC officials were all on the ground.

Incidents

- In Manowa Court Barray, Polling Centre Code 1206, Polling Station 2, a voter presented a voter ID card, that had already been voted with. The Polling Centre Manager took the voter ID card from him and promised to further investigate the incident.
- In Laleihun Court Barray, Polling Centre Code 1216, polling stations 1 and 3, the Result Reconciliation Form (RRF) was signed whilst polling was still in progress. The APC party agent objected to the early signing of the RRFs and so refused to sign.
- Dr. Richard Konteh of the APC, went to polling centre code 1216 to inquire into the early signing of the RRF. Mr. Sahr Jusu of the SLPP was also at the centre and an argument ensued between the boys that each of them went with to the centre. Dr. Richard Konteh stood between the 2 groups to stop the argument from further escalating.
- At Mamboma Town Barray, Polling Centre 1203, Polling Station 1, there was disagreement among political party agents over the validity of one ballot paper where the voter had voted for one candidate but there was a drop of ink on the other candidate. The ballot was declared valid by the senior NEC official in charge.

Concerns

- At Nyamundu Court Barray, Polling Centre Code 1222, an armed OSD deployed to the centre was visibly drunk even before midday. One of his colleagues took his gun from him.
- The presence of senior political party officials and government ministers and officials moving with groups of youths on polling day in Constituency 010 was disturbing.

Recommendations

- NEC should ensure there is a sample indicating valid votes and invalid votes in all polling stations on polling day.
- NEC to ensure clarity on when political party agents should sign the RRF.
- Political Party leaders should refrain from moving around in polling locations with groups of youths.
- The SLP should ensure professionalism among police officers when they are on duty.

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.

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