



## NATIONAL ELECTION WATCH (NEW)

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### Press Statement for Immediate Release

***Freetown 15<sup>th</sup> May 2021: NEW Observes the 10<sup>th</sup> Day – the Initial Last Day of NCRA Confirmation and Registration Exercise in the Western Region and Confirms that there are Outstanding Number of Unattended Applicants.***

NEW observed the 10<sup>th</sup> day which was the initial last day of the National Civil Registration Authority (NCRA) Confirmation and Registration exercise in the Western Region. The day closed with several unattended applicants in queues, which confirms the need for an extension. NEW acknowledges the effort of NCRA to respond to some of the challenges raised by NEW at the start of the process. NEW however, calls on NCRA to pay attention to certain structural issues which the extension cannot address, some of which are: Long distances between centres; under staffing at centres; inadequate equipment at centres; repeated malfunctioning of the equipment; weak monitoring of the process by Senior staff of NCRA. NEW therefore calls on NCRA to do a thorough appraisal of the initial 10 days of the process for the extension to meet its desired goal.

NEW recruited, trained and deployed 108 stationed observers, which is 50% of the NCRA established confirmation and registration centres to observe the 1<sup>st</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> day of the exercise. In addition to the stationed observers NEW also deployed supervisors 1 to every 10 observers and 6 roving teams of 3 each to have a fair coverage of the entire process.

### Findings

#### Process

- NEW observed huge turn out on day 10, the initial last day of the process.
- NEW observed poor queue control in several centres and the setup did not allow for a smooth process.
- In some of the centres observed, applicants were at the centres very early in the morning and in some cases, they spent the night at the centres.
- There is a general lack of awareness and inconsistency in the application of the rule on identification. This resulted in frustration of applicants who were asked to go back for documentation after staying long in the queue.
- NEW is concerned about the large crowds in the centres with no COVID-19 protocols observed.

### **Logistics and Equipment**

- Malfunctioning of equipment continues to be a challenge and this was observed in a number of centres including (Bishop Crowther Primary School Cline Street Kanikay, Comforti Primary School Main Motor Road Matoko, Baptist Primary Secondary School Mayemie, New Apostolic Preparatory School Samuels Old Road, Bethel Methodist Church Granny Church City Road Wellington, Mohandas Jondy Islamic Secondary School) resulting in undue delays.
- In some centres observed, there were two computers which helped to stabilize the process.
- NEW observed that one computer was insufficient to service the long queue of applicants.
- There was improvement in the operation of the generators at the centres.

### **NCRA Personnel**

- In some centres visited, the number of NCRA staff was less than 5 and this is systemic especially in the Western Rural District.
- Whilst NEW commends the courage of some citizens to avail themselves to volunteer their services in various aspects of the process, NEW is concerned that the NCRA recruited and trained staff would allow a non-staff to interact with Citizens Data.
- NEW observed that staff in most centres especially in Western Rural District, were not recruited from the localities of the centres excluding local knowledge in the process.

### **Functionality and Accessibility of centres**

- Most of the centres observed did not open on time (8:00am) mostly due to collection of materials from the NCRA Headquarter.
- Though the rule states that all who are in the queue at 5:00pm should be attended to, in most centres observed, staff turned away applicants giving them numbers for preferential treatment the next day. Failure to accord the promised preferential treatment resulted in chaos at the centres.
- NEW observed that in some centres preferential treatment was granted to persons with special needs; mothers with babies, the aged, children and Persons with Disability (PWDs) but this procedure was inconsistently applied.
- NEW observed initiatives to enhance the speedy registration of children. Worthy of note is Ansarul Mosque Robis Road, where the supervisor paid special attention to children noting that weekends are the best opportunity to register them so that they will not miss school. Some other centres made special provisions by putting the children in separate queues or rooms to facilitate their confirmation and registration.
- In the Western Rural District, NEW observed that applicants had to walk long distances to access centres, for example, the Agriculture Store centre, Fabaina serves over 17 Villages which are far apart.
- NEW observed that crowd control in centres within enclosed facilities were better managed.
- NEW observed the relocation of a number of centres mostly due to suitability or the refusal by facility owners to accommodate the centres.

### **Security/ Violence**

- There is general improvement in security presence at centres. NEW observed security officers from the Military and the SLP assuming spontaneous roles to help at the centres. Some of these were applicants.

- NEW observed violence at Maffa Field Open Space, Regent Road Lumley, which was relocated to the Lumley Hospital where a lady was stabbed and the crowd retaliated by stabbing the perpetrator. Violence also occurred in the following centers: Community Health Centre Groundnut Market, Susan's Bay; New Apostolic Church, Samuels Kissy; St. Martins Church Blackhall Road; Grassroots Community Primary School back of PWD Kissy; Baptist Secondary School Mayemie, Orugu Dam and St. Joseph's Primary School Joe Town.
- There was chaos at Bethel Methodist - Granny Church and the NCRA staff had to suspend the operation until the police intervened.
- At Olivette Baptist School Peacock Farm Wellington, the Ward Councilor brought 2 police officers to help organize the chaotic queues.

#### **Community support in the Exercise**

- There is a lot of community support in a number of centres where some members of the community work as queue controllers and doing community policing to maintain sanity in the process.
- In some centres, community people assisted with electricity, space for the exercise, storage of equipment at the end of each day, accommodation and food for staff to help sustain the process.

NEW calls on all residents in Sierra Leone to exercise their rights to confirm their details or register.

*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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***Banker: Sierra Leone Commercial Bank (SLCB)***