



## NATIONAL ELECTION WATCH (NEW)

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### Press Statement for Immediate Release

***Freetown, 24<sup>th</sup> September 2021: NEW Ends Pre-election Assessment in Koinadugu District and Identifies Interference of Non-indigenes as the Main Cause for Electoral Violence in the District***

National Election Watch (NEW) ahead of Local Council bye-elections for District Council Chairperson and Ward 155 Councillor ended a three-day pre-election assessment in Koinadugu District on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2021. From engagements with key stakeholders in the District, it was identified that the main cause of election violence in the District is the interference of non-indigenes imported into the district and the presence of the political party stalwarts who move around with marshals.

NEW met with the following stakeholders during the three-day pre-election assessment mission in Koinadugu district: National Electoral Commission (NEC), Office of National Security (ONS)/District Security Committee (DiSeC), Sierra Leone Police (SLP), Radio Bintumani Management, Political parties and their candidates (APC and SLPP), Paramount Chiefs of Sengbe and Wara Wara Yagala chiefdoms, Section chiefs, Youths at Attaya bases in Alkalia, Chief Imam in Alkalia, Pastor in Kabala, Mammy Queens and teachers.

A team of 6 from the NEW Strategic Management Committee (SMC), Regional and District Structures and Secretariat staff, formed the pre-election assessment team. The objectives of the mission were: to assess the preparedness of the Election Management Bodies (EMBs) and elections stakeholders, know the level of awareness and readiness for the two bye-elections, find out potential causes of violence, identify potential hotspots and proffer recommendations to relevant stakeholders including the EMBs and the Security Sector for proper planning and engagement to ensure peaceful and credible elections.

### Findings

#### Issues raised/findings

The following came out very clearly throughout all the engagements:

- Both bye-elections are contested by only two political parties: the All People's Congress Party (APC) and the Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) with no independent candidates.
- There has been no major violence since NEC declared dates for the two bye-elections, but stakeholders constantly referenced previous bye-elections violence in the district.
- Both political parties have so far complied with the campaign schedule and guidelines.
- Both political parties however complained that their campaign posters have been destroyed. For the SLPP they complained it happened in Yinfi and Kalkoya, while the APC claimed theirs happened at Ismaia Road in Kabala.
- In Alkalia, the local authorities complained that people from Tonkolili district joined the SLPP campaign and in a scuffle damaged the community water pipe.
- There is an ongoing conflict over which district Tunkoli village belongs to, and this has resulted in clashes between residents of the border communities of Koinadugu and Tonkolili districts. Residents most of the time flee the village as a result of the clashes. There is the fear that this

might affect the election in the community which NEC has already identified as being within the electoral boundary of the bye-elections.

- The hotspots identified that requires maximum security attention were; Bafodia, Yinfin, Alkalia, Fadugu and Kabala. Other communities might become volatile with the importation of thugs and or presence of political parties heavyweights.
- NEC has had two stakeholder engagements in Kabala and Alkalia where campaign schedules and guidelines were agreed on and also conducted voter education. NEC furthered the voter education using radio stations in the district and hired town criers carrying voter education messages in local languages.
- The SLP has closely followed the activities of the bye-elections and provided timely intervention to avert violence. The SLPP candidates were accompanied by a large crowd to the nominations but the police allowed only the agreed number into the nomination precinct. On getting the report of destruction of campaign poster in Kalkorya, the police immediately stepped in to prevent retaliation and the matter is under investigation.
- The SLP reported that the Vice President of Sierra Leone has earlier on engaged them during his visit to Koinadugu district on their neutrality and professionalism in policing the entire electoral process. They said, he acknowledged the need for additional logistics and man power to enable the police to be effective in the discharge of their duties. This acknowledgement stems from the fact that the Koinadugu Police Division has only one vehicle effectively functioning and another one that is used only in the township.
- The Paramount Chiefs have so far maintained neutrality and allowed all political parties and candidates campaign in their chiefdoms without hindrance.

## **Recommendations**

New recommends that:

- The Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC), should encourage registered political parties to participate in bye-elections and give opportunity to the electorates for multiple options to choose from.
- Importation of thugs and presence of political party heavyweights that are not indigenes into Koinadugu district during the upcoming bye-elections be completely discouraged. Only NEC accredited persons and vehicles should be allowed into the district on polling day.
- Police mount checkpoints in all the main routes leading to Koinadugu district and to major polling centres, to ensure only the right people enter the district or go around polling centres on polling day.
- The police step up their standards and beef up their preparedness in terms of personnel and logistics to adequately police the elections not only in Kabala, but also in remote communities and roads where violence is feared to happen through mobile patrols.
- The SLP continue their professional and non-partisan engagement with the political process.
- NEC to continue with the voter education effort to ensure citizens' participation and minimize incidents of void votes.
- Key stakeholders including the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, the Provincial Secretary's office of North-eastern Region, District Administrations of Koinadugu and Tonkolili districts, the SLP and the Paramount Chiefs of neighbouring chiefdoms of Tunkoli community undertake a fact finding and reconciliation mission in the said community before the by-elections.
- Paramount Chiefs continue to be neutral and provide a level playing field for all candidates and political parties in their chiefdoms.

## **Conclusion**

NEW applauds all players including EMBs in the bye-election processes so far and urges them to continue in the same spirit to ensure that the conduct of the bye-elections is free, fair, participatory, and credible with an outcome that has integrity and accepted by all.

*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.*

*This Electoral Observation was realized with the financial support of the European Union. The contents of this publication 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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