



## CIVIL SOCIETY WORKING GROUP ON ELECTIONS & HUMAN RIGHTS IN SIERRA LEONE

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**Motto:** 'Ensuring transparency and respect for election rights in Sierra Leone'

**Office Address:** No. 89 Fort Street, Freetown, Sierra Leone, West Africa

**Tel:** +232 79167457/ +23288042716

**Email Address:** [elections2023@yahoo.com](mailto:elections2023@yahoo.com)

### PRESS STATEMENT

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#### 10 REASONS AS TO WHY THE RESPONSES FROM GOVERNMENT, THE JUDICIARY, NEC, PPRC AND THE POLICE REGARDING THE EU'S ELECTION FOLLOW-UP MISSION REPORT ARE UNNECESSARY, UNPRECEDENTED AND MISPLACED

The Civil Society Working Group on Elections and Human Rights notes with grave concern the responses from the Government of Sierra Leone, the National Electoral Commission, the Judiciary of Sierra Leone, the Political Parties Registration Commission and the Sierra Leone Police regarding the recent report from the European Union Election Follow-up Mission on Sierra Leone.

It could be recalled that the European Union Elections Follow-Up Mission published a report on the 29th October 2021 calling out on the election management bodies in Sierra Leone to address issues surrounding public mistrust, selective justice and biasness in the discharge of their functions.

Amongst other things, the report highlighted that '***these institutions' reputations are less trusted than is needed and that there are real grounds for concern in the ways in which these bodies have administered recent bye-elections***'. This grave indictment has sparked confrontational outburst and harsh responses from not only the government but also election management bodies in the country.

As the leading civil society consortium on elections and human rights in Sierra Leone, we find the responses from the government and other election management bodies not only unfortunate and misplaced, but also one that has the proclivity to undermine the good working relationship between Sierra Leone and the European Union and by extension other international donor partners within the global community.

Stated below are 10 reasons as to why we hold this view:

- 1) **EU Elections follow - up Mission report does not contain strange findings. It only corroborated previous reports and press releases issued out by credible CSO's in time past.**

It could be recalled that many civil society organizations like National Elections Watch, LEGAL LINK, Citizens Advocacy Network, the Renaissance Movement have all in time past commented on the poor administration of the conduct of certain bye-elections such as Constituency 110 re-run elections by NEC as well as the policing of such elections by the Sierra Leone Police. As a matter of fact, almost all civil society organizations decried the removal of nine elected parliamentarians by the judiciary replacing them with non-elected representatives. As such, the recent EU Follow-Up Elections Mission Report simply corroborated existing damning reports on election management bodies.

- 2) **The EU report was done out of good faith, goodwill and for the betterment of the nation's body politic, democratic good governance and electioneering process.**

Certainly, the publication of the report was done out of good faith and EU's effort larger vision in supporting democracy in African nations. As such, their intent in doing the publication was not clouded with any ill will or sentiments but to help Sierra Leone like other African nations continue to rebuild its democracy and body politic.

- 3) **The EU has been a valued partner in relation to the financing of Sierra Leone's public elections**

Without doubt, the EU is one of Sierra Leone's long-standing and viable partners in the area of financing democratic elections and ensuring good governance in the country. It

stands to reason therefore that the EU has the moral high ground and pedigree to question how Election Management Bodies run elections in the country particularly when they are done in ways that defeat transparency and fairness. It is justifiable for the EU to put their mouth where their money is.

**4) The EU report is balanced and contains good accolades and praises for the government as well**

On a critical look at the report, one will discover that the report does not only dwell on indictments but also commendations. For example, the report commends the government of Sierra Leone regarding decriminalization of libel, the introduction of a bill on gender and women's empowerment and improvement on the Independent Media Commission. So why the fuss and emphasis on just the indictable areas, as if the EU never praise sing the government on other developmental strides it has undertaken within the period under review.

**5) The open defensive and confrontational reaction of the government and election management bodies to the report has the proclivity of undermining the cherished relationship between Sierra Leone and the EU.**

Sierra Leone has beneficially enjoyed a friendship with the EU on many strata of international relations. For example, the EU continues to contribute to Sierra Leone's peace building and developmental efforts extensively. As such, the WORKING GROUP sees these recent unwarranted responses from election management bodies as one with a potential to lead this long-standing relationship to the abyss.

**6) This is not the first time the EU has made punitive recommendations to the government of Sierra Leone regarding Electoral reforms and credibility of Election Management Bodies.**

With a check in history, one may note that the EU has not refused itself the opportunity for once to publish punitive recommendations to the Government of Sierra Leone on electoral reforms. In essence, this is a tradition of the EU in Sierra Leone. For example, after the 2007 and 2012 elections, the EU, as one of the election observer bodies, made damning reports pointing to electoral reforms. None has however received such amount

of backlash from election management bodies as the one made in 2021.

**7) The EU has been very strategic in the area of infrastructural support and development of the nation of Sierra Leone.**

Indisputably, the EU has supported Sierra Leone not only in the area of elections and peace building, but also in terms of infrastructural developments. For example, the Sierra Leone -Liberia road and many other major bridges across the country are currently being funded by the EU. As a matter of fact, there is a National Authorizing Office established by the EU in Sierra Leone to help coordinate and supervise its funded projects. Hurting the EU therefore might gravely hamper these all important strategic projects that are ongoing in the country as well as those in the pipeline.

**8) The EU report meets the threshold of objectivity and fairness**

It is disheartening to learn that most of the responses from the Government and election management bodies pertaining to the EU Election Follow-up Mission Report were premised on lack of objectivity and biasness. This is certainly an erroneous and unwarranted indictment of the report to say the least. A cursory look at the report showcases that it meets the threshold of objectivity and fairness. This is the case because the report highlights not only the bad, but also the good and proffers recommendations for reform. This is certainly the approved benchmark of writing an objective report the world over. The hues and cries from the government and election management bodies therefore alleging biasness is misplaced and unfounded.

**9) Public distrust of the Police, NEC and the Judiciary has always loomed large.**

It is important to emphasize that the issue of distrust of election management bodies by Sierra Leoneans is not a new phenomenon. It has always loomed large. Such could be traced as far back as 1996- the beginning of democratic electioneering process in Sierra Leone. As a matter of fact also, many civil society perception surveys and reports undertaken in time past have indicted the police as serving the interest of the regime and not the people. Furthermore, other international ranking reports such as the World Justice Rule of Law Report have also raised serious indictments on the Judiciary of Sierra Leone which resulted in Sierra Leone dropping eight places below its previous

rank in 2020. The EU Report simply underscored this distrust that had long existed in the minds of the Sierra Leone population for election management bodies.

**10) Accepting the report in good faith and making strong commitment to electoral reforms could have been the most plausible way of responding by the government and election management bodies.**

Patriotic Sierra Leoneans and civil society organizations are all taking aback by the scathing responses from the government and election management bodies towards the EU report. This is certainly not the right response over an institution that has been so supportive towards the democratization process in Sierra Leone. Making recommendations to governments in a bid to stimulate policy and legal reforms is the principal work of such bodies. It ought to have been foreseeable therefore by the government and election management bodies that such institution will always proffer critical recommendations aimed to stimulate lasting reforms in the country. Reacting in the way they did therefore was certainly not a measured way of responding to such criticisms designed to provoke sustainable democratic good governance and electioneering process in the country.

**Conclusion**

From the above points raised, it stands to reason that the responses from the Government of Sierra Leone and all the election management bodies over the EU report were certainly an overstretch since the goal of the EU was simply aimed at identifying electoral threats and challenges and proffering recommendations for their reforms in a timely manner before the 2023 elections. Any thought beyond this objective is simply misplaced and unfounded.

We therefore urge the Government of Sierra Leone and the election management bodies to make amends with the European Union so as to quickly restore the good bilateral relationship that had long existed between Sierra Leone and the European Union.

**#END**

**Sign:**



**Rashid Dumbuya Esq.**  
**Human Rights & Elections Officer**

*On behalf of the Civil Society Working Group on Elections and Human Rights in SL*

**Sign:**



**Thomas Moore Conteh**  
**National Coordinator**