

CSO PLATFORM ON NON VIOLENCE

Press Statement

November 18, 2021
Freetown, Sierra Leone

THE WORRISOME STATE OF 'SECURITY OF VOTES' AND THE CLIMATE OF FEAR AND INTIMIDATIONS SURROUNDING THE BY-ELECTIONS IN KENEMA CITY WARD 069, CONST. 021 AND SANDOR CHIEFDOM WARD 091, CONST. 27

The CSO Platform on Non Violence Elections while commending the peaceful conduct of by-election in Kenema City ward 069, we are concerned with securitizations of elections and the atmosphere of fear clouded by hate speeches, intimidation and violence in Sandor Chiefdom Ward 091, Kono District, particularly in Bangabayah and Yayah villages.

The international as well as regional human rights instruments such as Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) define freedom of expression as a fundamental human right; and also discourage the promotion of any speech or expression that is capable of inciting hate that can spark violence, destroy peaceful coexistence, lives and properties.

We observed that since the pronouncement of by-elections in Ward 069 and 091 by the National Electoral Commission (NEC) there have been reported cases of hate speeches and intimidation perpetrated by some politicians and their supporters in ward 091. Although the Political Party Registration Commission (PPRC) organized a float parade for all political parties contesting the by-elections, an action designed to create peaceful coexistence and violence free election, there were reported cases, in which party supporters were intimidated by security personnel and their lives threatened.

The CSO Platform observed that in the run-up to the by-elections, particularly in ward 091 in Sandor Chiefdom, Kono District there were series of incidences that threatened freedom of expression and the will of the people as reflected in the results. The CSO Platform continues to monitor the situation closely. We believe the climate of fear and intimidation arising from hate speeches and heavy police presence discouraged some people from coming out on polling day for fear of their safety and security.

CSO Platform observed as worrisome the seizure of opposition party members cellphones and the passive role of the Sierra Leone Police in addressing cases of violence in polling centers in Bangabayah and Yayah villages, concerns over NEC recruitments of polling staff and the government not doing enough to curb unethical acts by politicians.

We call on all Sierra Leoneans to continue to conduct themselves peacefully as we approach the 2022 local council elections and the general election in 2023, specifically, during and after casting their votes and be magnanimous in accepting the results.

The CSO Platform on Non Violence elections calls for the following actions:

1. The government to condemn strongly all acts of hate speech and intimidation
2. The political parties must hold zero-tolerance policy towards hate speech and intimidation
3. The police should investigate and prosecute all acts of hate speech and violence in Bangabayah and Yayah villages in Ward 091
4. NEC should investigate the incident in Yayah Village Ward 091 and possibly conduct a re -election in Polling stations in Yayah Village.

The CSO Platform on Non Violence is a consortium of about 120 CSOs drawn from all 16 districts of the country working on human rights and elections with specific focus on promoting women's participation in governance, peace and national cohesion, and ensuring respect for human rights before, during and after elections.

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