



# NATIONAL ELECTION WATCH

A Coalition of Civic and Non-Governmental Organizations

2 MIK Drive, Murray Town, Freetown.

+232-76-737-231

[nationalelectionwatchsl@gmail.com](mailto:nationalelectionwatchsl@gmail.com)

[www.nationalelectionwatchsl.org](http://www.nationalelectionwatchsl.org)

## OPEN LETTER TO THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION FOR SIERRA LEONE (ECSL)

26<sup>th</sup> October, 2022.

Mr. Mohamed Kenewui Konneh,  
Chairman and Chief Electoral Commissioner,  
Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone (ECSL)  
Tower Hill,  
Freetown.

Dear Commissioner Konneh,

### **Ref: Request for Public Explanation on the Status of the August 2022 Boundary Delimitation Exercise and the Reasons for the Proposed Changes in Our Electoral System**

It is with serious concern, as a civil society elections observation organisation, that we write in the public interest, to seek a comprehensive explanation from ECSL on the status of the August 2022 Boundary Delimitation exercise for the purposes of the 2023 general elections, and the Commission's justification for the proposed change in our electoral system from the Constituency-Based First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system, to the District Block Proportional Representation (PR) system.

NEW notes with disbelief, a tweet from your twitter account on Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> October 2022, in which you informed your followers about a fundamental constitutional issue regarding changes in the electoral system. The tweet was later followed by a Press Release dated 21<sup>st</sup> October, 2022 in which the ECSL, referencing section 38A of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone and other relevant provisions, informed the public that, following directives from HE President Julius Maada Bio, the 2023 multi-tier elections will be conducted using the Proportional Representation (PR) system. In our view, we think the decision on the choice of an electoral system (which is constitutional) is too important an issue for the public to be informed via a tweet. Notwithstanding, it is the view of NEW that the public deserves a comprehensive explaining on the justification(s) and need for the change in our electoral system, less than nine months to our general elections. Our request is critical because, there has been little discussion of such a system and the electorate has virtually no comprehension of how this system will work at this point. A low public understanding on the PR system and its introduction close to a multi-tier



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election will further compound the already complex and tense electoral context.

Secondly, we refer to an ECSL Press Release dated 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2022, in which the Electoral Commission announced the commencement of Boundary Delimitation exercise for the demarcation of Constituencies and Wards for the purpose of the 2023 general elections. We also note that an ECSL Press Release of 21<sup>st</sup> October 2022, announced the use of the PR system for the 2023 elections, the Commission equally halted with immediate effect, the Boundary Delimitation exercise which had commenced as per the 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2022 Press Release. We request for public explanation on the status of the Boundary Delimitation exercise as we are aware that, from the onset the Commission had made provision for Boundary Delimitation as an externality that could influence the Strategic Plan of the Commission.

NEW will like to draw the Commission's attention to the importance of TRUST and INTEGRITY in elections management and the need to communicate with citizens and stakeholders in a timely and inclusive manner. Abrupt and piecemeal communication, non-consultative decision making, changing the electoral calendar and announcing a fundamental change in the electoral process via twitter, have the potential to undermine trust and integrity in the electoral process and the overall peace and stability of the country. We raise these critical issues because NEW notes that in early 2022, the date for the multi-tier elections has been announced and political parties and potential candidates had taken steps to participate in the elections on the basis of the Constituency-based First Past the Post electoral system. To announce an abrupt change in the electoral system without due consultation is disruptive.

Before proceeding to the next activities of the elections, it will be critical for the Commission to answer the following questions:

- Were the Political Parties and other stakeholders consulted before reaching the decision to halt the Boundary Delimitation exercise and introduce the PR for the 2023 elections?
- What is the legal basis for the change of the electoral system?
- Are the 2017 boundaries (which have a minimum of five and a maximum of seven years) dissolved? What informed the dissolution?
- Does the provision of section 38A cover Local Council elections? If no, what law will guide PR for the Local Council elections?
- What data will inform the allocation of parliamentary seats and wards per districts?

- How will the proposed PR cater for independent candidates?

NEW will welcome the opportunity to meet with you and other commissioners of ECSL in person to discuss these issues further, especially in light of the need for public dialogue and the fact that some opposition political parties and members of the public are questioning the legality of the PR electoral system.

Finally, for the sake of good elections, peace and stability, it will be vital that as a nation, we arrive at common understanding of the rationale behind these changes, and a consultative process take place in order to collectively find solutions to these outstanding, critical issues that we have raised in this letter.

We appreciate your time and consideration and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,  
National Election Watch (NEW)



*National Election Watch (NEW) is a coalition of 400 local and international organizations in Sierra Leone with a common objective of supporting credible and peaceful elections.*

*XXX End XXX*

**Contacts: Marcella Samba-Sesay +23276984590, James Lahai +23276962233, Sallieu Kamara +23276613324**

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