

Kenya-Sierra Leone Party Youth Peer-to-Peer Exchange Visit

*Kenya Inter-Party Youth Forum (IPYF)
and Sierra Leone All Political Party Youth Association (APPYA)*

Press statement

From 28 October through 1 November, the Sierra Leone All Political Parties Youth Association (APPYA) hosted representatives of the Kenya Inter-Party Youth Forum (IPYF) during a **peer-to-peer exchange visit** to share experiences about the role of youth in the political and electoral process.

During the visit, APPYA and IPYF discovered they have many common challenges, goals, and tactics. Both struggle with issues such as politicized ethnicity, gender imbalances, youth under-representation in government, unemployment, and uneven wealth distribution. Both groups are working to overcome these challenges, and both preach the same message of encouraging youth to vote and act peacefully during elections. Both groups promote political tolerance and ask youths to accept each other's differing views and opinions.

APPYA is a federation of youth from the 10 registered political parties in Sierra Leone. APPYA's objective is to achieve political tolerance and nonviolence in the country. Ahead of the November elections, the association has engaged irate youths in every district headquarters town across the country through town hall meetings, inter-party soccer competitions, live radio phone-in programs, and multiparty social events.

The **IPYF** comprises youth representatives from seven political parties in Kenya. Similar to APPYA, it has been established to provide a platform for constructive engagement and to strengthen the participation of youth across and within political parties.

This exchange visit was first proposed by Dr. Christiana Thorpe, Chairman of the National Electoral Commission (NEC), when she met IPYF representatives as part of a pre-election delegation in Kenya earlier this year. The visit is sponsored by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), which has been supporting APPYA's efforts to promote peaceful polls.

Exchange Meetings with Stakeholders in Sierra Leone's General Elections

During the visit, APPYA and IPYF met with a number of election stakeholders to assess the state of preparations for the upcoming elections and to understand the differences between the two countries' electoral systems.

APPYA-IPYF Exchange

The visit began with each organization sharing its country's political history; both groups come from countries with histories of political violence, as Kenya experienced clashes following its 2007 elections. **Each group also shared its organizational history, structure, challenges, activities, and successes, particularly those involving the peaceful engagement of youth during elections.**

Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC)

The PPRC explained its structure and role compared to the NEC. The discussion focused on how political parties should adhere to non-violence and other electoral commitments to ensure peaceful, free and fair elections. **APPYA expressed appreciation for the PPRC's role in providing assistance to the association.**

Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC)

Discussions with the media centered on the importance of objective reporting and non-partisan coverage of the elections process, and the steps media are taking to ensure these principles are upheld. SLBC shared its guidelines for election coverage, to which all of its journalists adhere. SLBC explained its practice of allocating equitable coverage to political parties, so that none receive more references than others. **APPYA appreciates SLBC's commitment to also provide APPYA with airtime to help promote peaceful elections.**

Civil Society Roundtable

During a roundtable meeting with representatives of Democracy Sierra Leone, the Forum of Sierra Leonean Youth Network, and the National Youth Coalition, APPYA and IPYF appreciated the role of civil society in the political process. Civil society groups, as independent organizations that are not driven by the government or political parties, are valuable allies in advocating for issues that are important to youth. **APPYA welcomes these civil society groups as partners and looks forward to collaborating with them to promote peaceful elections.**

All People's Congress Rally

APPYA accompanied IPYF to the APC rally day on Tuesday, 30 October at the National Stadium. IPYF appreciated how peaceful the rally was. This visit was the first time many APPYA members had attended a rally for an opposing political party, but they noted that **the rally was a valuable opportunity to observe how it was conducted and demonstrate that youth from different parties with different beliefs can still attend a political event together without violence.**

National Electoral Commission (NEC)

APPYA and IPYF attended NEC's press conference giving an update on election preparedness conducted by Chairperson Christiana Thorpe. IPYF thanked Dr. Thorpe for suggesting this fruitful exchange. APPYA and IPYF also met with NEC separately to learn about the electoral process and NEC's preparations for the polls, including the ways in which it is improving on the 2007 elections, such as by implementing biometric voter registration and decentralizing the tabulation process so that districts can release local and parliamentary results. NEC appreciated learning from IPYF about the consequences of elections in which the results are not accepted, and will strive to avoid this situation. **APPYA appreciates the government's and international community's efforts to capacitate NEC towards effective polls, and APPYA congratulates NEC on its efforts and expects it to continue to ensure that Sierra Leone holds free, fair, and credible elections.**

NEC expressed appreciation of APPYA's past efforts during by-elections to ensure peaceful polls, and APPYA hopes to continue this good work. **Given the newly announced restrictions on movement on election day, APPYA plans to apply for accreditation to move about on election day to promote peaceful polls, and asks NEC to look favourably on this application. APPYA also looks forward to resuming its role as an observer on the Political Party Liaison Committee convened regularly by NEC in the lead-up to the polls.**

APPYA Community Peace Forum

IPYF attended APPYA's community peace forum held in western Freetown on October 31, at which party youth leaders, civil society representatives, police, and other election stakeholders urged youth from all 10 parties to shun violence in the elections. IPYF representatives also told the party youth their observations of Sierra Leone and experiences in Kenya. **The party youth in attendance committed to avoid violence on election day and spread the message to their peers.**

Political Party Leaders

Leaders from the political parties met with APPYA and IPYF to discuss the measures they are taking to encourage their members to shun inciting youth to violence during the elections. **APPYA asks party leaders to continue to support APPYA in its endeavors.**

Lessons Learned during the Exchange

- Kenyans are very patriotic and have come to understand their civic rights and responsibilities as laid out in their constitution. **Sierra Leone should strive to encourage its citizens to be patriotic and knowledgeable about their rights, and this can be achieved through civic education programs in schools and other forums.**
- Kenyan parties and civil society came together to achieve a “yes” vote in a 2010 constitutional referendum, demonstrating the power of collective action and the ability of citizens to participate actively in their government and make their voices heard. **In Sierra Leone, the people should understand that they also have this power to influence government and should exercise their rights more often.**
- Kenya has implemented a constitution that promotes gender equality, including a requirement that 30% of parliamentary seats be saved for women as well as affirmative action measures for youth. In Sierra Leone, a 30% women law has been advocated, but it has not yet passed. **APPYA promotes affirmative action measures in this country that are closer to those in Kenya.**
- Young people can run for elective office in Kenya starting at age 18; the youngest member of the Kenyan parliament and cabinet minister is 33 years of age, and one presidential candidate is 28 years old. As APPYA foresees that youth will be even more active in the next election in 2017, **it suggests that the laws should be changed to empower the next generation of politically active youth, so that they can run for office at the district and national levels.**
- IPYF has learned that APPYA has a strong network across the country and effective cooperation with government bodies, civil society groups, and political parties; they also have a practical and innovative approach to peace-building initiatives.
- **Young leaders in both countries should be encouraged and empowered, as they have a lot of energy to share in making government effective, and they can bring fresh ideas and perspectives to policymaking.**

APPYA’s Expectations for the Upcoming Elections

APPYA expects that:

- **The NEC** will hold clean and credible elections.
- **The Sierra Leone Police** will support NEC by providing security for the elections, especially at polling stations, and will not use violent force against civilians.
- **Unsuccessful parties and candidates** will accept defeat gracefully and peacefully.
- **Media** will be unbiased and play an independent role in providing Sierra Leoneans with nonpartisan information about the elections.
- **The PPRC** will remain impartial and enforce regulations of parties.
- **Civil society** will remain neutral in its activities, act as a watchdog of parties and government, and help to educate the public about the electoral process.
- **APPYA itself** will continue to promote tolerance and demonstrate leadership among party youth.

APPYA and IPYF are grateful to NEC and NDI for the support that they have given us. We look forward to further cooperation between IPYF, APPYA and NDI in an effort to expand democratic space and safeguard the gains we have made thus far.

1 November, 2012