

INTERIM REPORT ON MAY 14, 2002, ELECTION IN SIERRA LEONE.

1. Introduction

This interim report is a follow up to the preliminary one released on May 15, barely twenty-four hours after the close of polls. In other words, this is in fulfillment of NEW's promise to come out with a much more detailed report on the May 14 Presidential and Parliamentary elections.

This report is based on the analysis of 1804 [one thousand eight hundred and four] election observers' checklists received from the field/polling stations throughout the country. This number [1804] represents 82% of the total of 2200 [two thousand two hundred] election observers trained by NEW between April 4 and May 10, 2002, and deployed on Election Day.

NEW is proud to state that it was able to deploy observers to all the fourteen districts in the country. However, this analysis does not include the checklists from Koinadugu district as most of them were found not to be very reliable. In terms of coverage of polling stations, NEW was able to cover 34.4% of the total 5257 [five thousands two hundred and fifty-seven] polling stations. This indeed is a remarkable achievement considering the fact that this kind of exercise is the first of its kind in the country and that NEW faced a number of challenges. Among these challenges were:

- i.* logistics and the harmonizing of the activities of volunteers from many different organizations,
- ii.* some technical errors in the development of the checklist,

The checklist made available to observers sought to find answers to some salient questions which were/are very critical to free, fair, peaceful and transparent election. NEW likes to put on record that although it received other anecdotal reports, this analysis is mainly based on what our observers could verify.

The questions asked in the checklist covered the following four broad areas:

- a. events before the start of polls [items 1 - 4]
- b. events during the polls [items 5 - 11]
- c. events after the polls [items 12 - 14]
- d. overall assessment of the polls by observers [15 & 16]

The analysis thus covers the various items under the above broad sub-headings [See appendix A for a copy of the checklist.

2. Findings:

2.1. Events before the start of Polls:

Voting materials: A significant 92.6% of observers noted that voting materials were available before 7:00 a.m. when polling was scheduled to start. However, 7.4% reported that voting materials had not arrived as at 7:00 a.m. Obviously, this led to some delay in the opening of polls in the affected polling stations.

Presence of party agents: This was one of the areas where the various political parties were not able to adequately make their presence felt. According to observers' reports, only 37% of ALL political party agents were present at the start/beginning of polls. In other words, for 63% of the time, not all party agents were present before the start of polls. The key word here is ALL hence it does not mean that there was not even a single party agent at the beginning of polls in 63 out of every 100 polling stations observed.

Ballot boxes empty before polls?. One of the major accusations usually leveled against some electoral officials and/or governments elsewhere is the stuffing of ballot boxes with already thumb printed ballots in favour of one party either before, during or at after polls. The need to ensure that the ballot boxes were empty at the start of polls was therefore very crucial. To the question whether the ballot box was empty before polls, a significant 99.2% responded in the affirmative while the remaining .8% said no. There was however no indications by the .8% who said no as to what were in the boxes.

Was the ballot box locked after it has been shown?. On the issue/question of whether ballot boxes were locked after they have been shown to the public for inspection, 98.4% said yes while 1.4% responded in the negative.

2.2. During Election.

Did the polls start on time? Whereas 88.2% reported that polling started on time, 11.8% said it did not. This is not surprising against the background that 7.4% indicated under *voting materials* above that as at 7:00 a.m. some polling stations had not received their polling materials.

Maintenance of order within the polling station: For a successful and peaceful polls, the maintenance of law and order before, during and after the polls is very crucial. It was therefore important to note that nearly 98% [97.5%] of the observers reported that order was maintained throughout the polls. About 3.0% of observers however noted that order was not maintained throughout the polls.

Was security adequate? After almost a decade of civil war and less than six months of relative peace, many were concerned about adequate security during the polls. It is therefore significant to note that almost 90% [89.4%] of the observers reported that adequate security was provided. The remaining 10.6% however reported that security was not adequate and probably could have been better.

Was ballot box within sight? One of the major accusations leveled against some electoral officials is that of tampering with ballot boxes before, during and/or after polls. The above question was therefore one of the important benchmarks for free and fair election. An overwhelming 98.8% of observers reported that the ballot boxes were within sight all the time, while 1.2% noted that they were not within sight all the time.

Interference with the voting process: Furthermore, one of the major areas of concern to observers was interference during the polls. Twelve per cent [12.3%] of observers noted that there was some form of interference during the polls. There was however no indication either of the nature or form of the interference or who interfered. In spite of this a majority of 87.7% reported no interference.

Secrecy of voting: To avoid post election retribution of those who voted against the winning party, provisions are normally made for voters to indicate their preference in secrecy [in booths out of the view of others]. Asked if this was effective in maintaining the secrecy of the voting, 3.8% said no while the rest [96.2%] reported that all voting was done in secret.

NEW wishes to take this opportunity to express a serious concern over the inability of the National Electoral Commission to include the results of the special votes with the rest of the votes cast on May 14. Declaring the special votes separately from the rest under-mined the secrecy of voting, for a large number of Sierra Leoneans and also raised political concerns. It is the hope of NEW that in future such a mistake will be avoided.

Furthermore, the need for extra help given to voters by electoral officials as a result of inadequate voter education could also have affected adversely voter secrecy.

Were women deterred from voting? One important issue that has engaged the attention of the international community over the past decade is the rights of women. Until recently the issue of women's right was no issue at all in most Third World countries. In response to the question whether women were deterred from voting, only 1.2% of observers responded in the affirmative. No specific reason was however assigned. A significant 98.8% however reported no such incident indicating that women were free as their male counterpart to vote without any intimidation.

2.3. After the Polls.

Did the polls close on time? Only 5.8% reported that voting went beyond 5:00 p.m. Thus, most [94.2] observers noted that voting ended on time in most polling stations. It must be noted however that the voting regulations/electoral laws allow for voting to continue after 5:00 p.m. if there were voters still in the queue at 5:00 p.m. It is only those who arrive after 5:00 p.m. that are not to be allowed to vote.

Was the lock on ballot intact after the polls? Another area of concern was the security of the ballot. As many as 39% of observers reported that the lock on the ballot was broken at the end of the polls. Sixty-one per cent [61%] of them did not report any such incident – locks were secured at the end of the polls.

Was counting conducted in the presence of party agents? Only 2.0% of the observers reported that the counting process was not done in the presence of party agents and the public. The overwhelming majority [98%] of observers indicated that the counting process was very

transparent – carried out in the presence and view of party agents and the general public.

2.4. Overall Assessment of the Polls.

General Assessment/impression of the polls: Asked whether the polling was free and fair, almost all [98.9%] of the observers responded in the affirmative while the remaining 1.1% said that it was partially free and fair. Very significantly, no observer [0%] rated it as not free and fair.

Conduct of election officials: Almost 100% [99.8%] of the observers praised the electoral officials for a satisfactory work done. Only .2% said the work of the electoral officials was not satisfactory.

3. Incident Report Forms:

To have an idea of specific incidents, which occurred during the polls, observers were in addition to the checklist given *Incident Report Forms* to report on any incident that had the potential to breach the peace or adversely affect the smooth process of the polls. NEW is happy to announce that no serious incident was observed. Minor ones reported included:

- attempted multiple voting;
- attempted underage voting;
- argument with polling officials;
- impersonation;
- wrong voters' register sent to some polling stations;
- shouting of party slogan at the polling station;
- shortage of voting materials and
- attempts by some voters to jump queue;

4. Conclusion

In the opinion of NEW, the responses to the items on the checklist submitted by NEW observers and other field reports received are a true reflection of the election-day activities. From these reports, there were no **systematic or serious electoral malpractices/irregularities** that compromised the outcome of the results. In the opinion of NEW therefore, the May 14, 2002, Presidential and Parliamentary elections meet international standards of FREE, FAIR, PEACEFUL AND TRANSPARENT ELECTION.

NEW likes to take this opportunity to congratulate the people of Sierra Leone for a good work done. More importantly, NEW wishes to express its

profound gratitude to all the eleven [11] member organizations which deployed observers on polling day namely;

- Sierra Leone Teachers Union, SLTU
- Civil Society Movement, CSM
- Academic Staff Association, University of Sierra Leone ASA
- Movement for the Restoration of Democracy, MRD
- Council of Churches in Sierra Leone, CCSL
- Center for the Coordination of Youth Activities, CCYA
- Inter Religious Council of Sierra Leone, IRCSL
- Network Movement for Justice & Development, NMJD
- Forum for Democratic Initiatives, FORDI
- Campaign for Good Governance, CGG
- Women's Forum, WF

and to the other seven organizations which supported and contributed to NEW in other ways. These include the following;

- Sierra Leone Bar Association, SLBA
- Sierra Leone Association of Journalist, SLAJ
- Sierra LEONE Labour of Congress, SLLC
- National Commission for Democracy & Human Rights, NCDHR
- National Forum for Human Rights, NFHR
- National Union of Sierra Leone Students, NUSLS
- Campaign Against Violent Events, CAVE

A final and a more comprehensive report containing other details and recommendations will be ready by middle of July.

Thank you.

Freetown
Monday, May 27, 2002

Rev. L.B. Rogers-Wright
[Chairman]