

## Elections Coordinating Committee Statement on the Voter Registration Process

*March 16, 2011*

### Introduction

The Elections Coordinating Committee (ECC) is a civil society platform to observe and monitor the 2011 electoral cycle. The main activities include the voter's registration exercise, the campaign process, adherence to election's laws by all stakeholders, the referendum, the polling day, as well as post-election responses. The ECC is comprised of two pro-democracy and peace-building coalitions: the Civil Society Organizations National Election Coalition (CSO-NEC) and the National Committee for Election Monitoring (NACEM). Search for Common Ground/Talking Drum Studio serves as the chair of the ECC. These two coalitions have membership across the country. The ECC is in partnership with several organizations including the National Democratic Institute (NDI).

The mission of the ECC is to build a network of civil society organizations to support a credible and sustainable democratic and governance process in Liberia. In pursuit of this mission, the overarching goal of the ECC is: To increase citizens' confidence in Liberia's emerging and fragile democracy.

### Executive Summary

Liberia's emerging democracy will be tested based on the credibility and the level of transparency in which the upcoming 2011 general elections will be conducted. This is against the background that these elections, unlike 2005, will be largely managed by the incumbent government administered through the National Elections Commission (NEC). Having monitored the voter registration exercise in six counties, the ECC concludes that voter registration was peaceful, transparent and free of systematic violations in the centers observed. At the same time, there were challenges in terms of logistics, security presence and other shortcomings that require attention for future electoral processes.

### Methodology

One major activity undertaken by the ECC in contributing to its mission and goal was to monitor and observe the 2011 voter's registration process. A total of 58 monitors were recruited from the membership of the coalitions and trained in elections monitoring and observation. Due to financial constraints and time limitation, the monitors were deployed in the following six counties: Montserrado, Cape Mount, Bong, Lofa, Nimba and Grand Gedeh. These counties were selected strategically, considering areas with a history of electoral disputes or the potential for conflict related to identity and citizenship in communities bordering other neighboring countries.

Each county had a coordinator to supervise the work of the monitors who then reported back to the ECC. The monitoring took place over a ten day period, five days at the beginning of the registration period, January 10 – 14, and five days at the end of the originally scheduled period, February 2-7. Observers were

stationary, staying at the same registration center for the full day. In total, 519 different voter registration centers were observed throughout the six counties.

All observers underwent training conducted by the ECC on their roles and responsibilities and signed a Code of Conduct ensuring their nonpartisanship. Information about the voter registration process was generated by the observers through standardized forms to collect and report their findings looking at different aspects of the process. The data was collated and analyzed. The key findings are categorized into the following themes reflecting the counties and centers observed:

### **Findings and Analysis:**

#### *Legal and Policy Framework*

The voter registration was guided by the following legal instruments: the Liberian Constitution, the New Elections Law of 1986, the Electoral Reform Law of 2004, the National Election Commission (NEC) guidelines and the Joint Resolution on the Special Threshold Bill. Some aspects of the legal framework may be altered based on the outcome of the August 2011 referendum. The registration period was originally scheduled for 24 days, from January 10 to February 6. However the NEC added a one-week extension in response to low voter turnout. Eligibility requirements for registering adhered to the Constitution and elections guidelines and are generally inclusive and non-discriminatory.

Rules and regulations for voter registration and the list of registration centers were made available in a timely manner, however the ECC did receive isolated reports of nonexistent centers or last-minute changes in center locations and names, particularly in Lofa.

Accreditation of CSOs was open but highly centralized thereby limiting the opportunity for groups in the rural areas to participate in the process.

In 2005, certain provisions of the elections law were altered which allowed NEC to use voter registration to demarcate constituencies. As a result of the Joint Resolution on the Special Threshold for 2011, voter registration will continue to provide the basis of demarcation instead of the 2008 census. This adds heightened political interest in where voters register and can undermine citizens' legislative representation. This provision runs counter to the 1986 Constitution.

#### *Election Administration and Logistics*

The voter registration process overall was well-organized and registration officials generally understood their roles in the counties observed, however observers did report some logistical problems. As compared to the first round of the 2010 Senatorial By-election, there was a significant improvement in the timely opening of centers with 87% of reported voter registration centers opening on time. Most counties reported that election officials and materials were present and in adequate amounts. However only 74% of centers opened on time in Montserrado, with late openings often due to the late arrival of polling officials, materials or lack of preparedness or a combination of all the mentioned factors, despite being in close proximity to the NEC's headquarters.

#### *Eligibility and Access*

There was no systematic attempt to deny or exclude particular ethnic or social groups from registering which would have denied them their right to vote as Liberians as guaranteed in the Constitution. Observers

reported relatively low numbers of ineligible persons being allowed to register; however there were some reports, particularly in Grand Gedeh and Grand Cape Mount, that eligibility criteria was not always consistently applied. ECC observers noted that there were significantly more registrants during the first week of the registration period than the fourth week, in the counties monitored.

In the registration centers observed, registrants were generally able to access their centers free from intimidation or obstructions. In addition, ECC observers overall had unhindered access to registration process and proceedings.

### *Political Parties' Representation*

Presence of party agents not disaggregated by specific parties was noted in 78% of centers. There was, however, low representation (nearly 50%) reported in Lofa and Grand Gedeh Counties.

### *Security*

The registration process was largely peaceful, with only scattered and isolated incidents of violence and intimidation that did not affect the process.

However, there was a low presence of uniformed security officers at the centers observed. Their presence was observed in only half of the centers observed and further limited presence in Bong and Nimba Counties, two counties where there have been reports of youth related violence over the past two years. The low presence of police may be attributed to the limited number of police that have been trained thus far (3,500)<sup>1</sup> as compared to the population. At the same time, there were few reports of security personnel interfering with the registration process or proceedings.

### *Certification of Preliminary Voters List*

While preliminary figures of registered voters have been announced, it is taking the National Elections Commission (NEC) a month to pronounce and make available comprehensive figures of registered voters disaggregated by county, districts, gender and age.

## **Recommendations:**

The ECC respectfully put forward the following recommendations for the NEC and other electoral stakeholders:

### *For the NEC*

- Gains made so far need to be leveraged through the adherence and enforcement of election laws during the remaining phases of the electoral cycle irrespective of political parties and candidates;
- Active communication with stakeholders and civil society regarding the unfolding electoral process should continue to be promoted;
- Election officials should work with civil society groups that have developed early warning and response mechanisms to organize a comprehensive strategy for preventing violent conflicts;

---

<sup>1</sup> Based on a recent Search for Common Ground study on security sector reform

## ELECTIONS COORDINATING COMMITTEE (ECC)

---

- Logistical and administrative capacity needs to be intensified to ensure the timely movement to and fro of election materials particularly in remote parts of the country, keeping in mind that UNMIL may not be playing a leading role in this direction;
- Work closely with the Liberia National Police and UNMIL in increasing the presence of security personnel in areas that are highly vulnerable to violent conflicts;
- Implement efforts to ensure that voters are well-educated on the importance and the details of the Exhibition and Objections process; and
- NEC should ensure that results of the final voters list, the referendum and the general election are aggregated and announced in a transparent and timely manner to limit doubts and suspicion.

### *For Civil Society*

- That civil society is engaged in facilitating dialogue between NEC and political parties to build confidence and enhance forums for problem-solving.

### *For Political Parties*

- That all political parties should be engaged in the integrity of the election through in the monitoring of the pre-election, referendum and election day processes

The ECC appreciates the NEC, political parties and other stakeholders for their cooperation in the conduct of the elections. We would also like to thank our observers and coordinators for their participation and commitment.

On behalf of the ECC:

CSO-NEC. *Joseph Cumme*

*E. J. J. J. J.*

For NACEM: *Malcolm Jasper*

*Nathanial*

*Mohamed M. Sheriff Sr.*  
*Mohammed M. Sheriff Sr.*

Chair: *Dean Bloh*

Press Contact:  
Joseph Cumme: 06542933  
Malcolm Jasper: 06514357