



Republic of Liberia
National Elections Commission (NEC)



SEPTEMBER 27, 2005

TALKING POINTS
CLLR. FRANCES JOHNSON-MORRIS
CHAIR OF THE NATIONAL ELECTIONS COMMISSION

☐ SUPREME COURT DECISION

With regard to the Supreme Court decision in the case of the marking of the Senatorial ballot, the Lower Court has still not cited the NEC for reading of the Supreme Court mandate in order for NEC to proceed to implement it.

☐ IDP LEADERS SEEK NEC ASSISTANCE

Leaders of 15 IDP camps had a meeting with the NEC chair and commissioners on September 26. The leaders, from camps located in Montserrado and Margibi stated that they have agreed to exercise their right to vote and not, as rumors imply, obstruct the electoral process. In addition they were seeking NEC's support in helping them obtain assistance from Humanitarian agencies tasked with the responsibility of facilitating their return back home. The IDP leaders outlined that their main challenge was returning home, and that they did not want to boycott the elections.

The NEC Chair reiterated that the Commission sympathizes with IDPs and wishes to include them in the process as evidenced by the special provision instated to allow them to vote for President and Vice President. This was NEC's way of accommodating IDPs not repatriated, even though the original understanding among IDPs and the NEC was that those who had chosen to do so during registration would vote in their county of origin.

The IDPs indicated that they would appreciate more Civic and Voter Education within the camps to better equip the voters to participate effectively on October 11. The NEC responded by giving on-the-spot training on voting steps and marking of ballots, and will schedule Civic and Voter education sessions to be conducted in the Camps before October 11. The camp leaders were asked to share what had learned when they return to their IDP camps.

The leaders assured the Commission that they would encourage the IDPs they were representing to be part of the process. The NEC is pleased with the direction its dealings with IDPs has been taking in the past two weeks and will continue to educate IDPs on the electoral process and to urge the responsible agencies to redouble their efforts to assist IDPs to return home.



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OVER 3,000 REPLACEMENT CARDS ISSUED

Ten days since the NEC began its replacement of lost voter cards exercise, 3,639 cards have been issued. As of September 27, 2,005 Replacement cards have been given to voters from Lower Montserrado while the remaining 1,634 are from the other counties combined. Cards will be issued until Friday, September 30.

The NEC wishes to emphasize to voters the importance of keeping their cards safe following the election on October 11, as these will be necessary in the event of a run-off election. A run-off election will be held if no one presidential candidate is able to obtain a majority following the first round of polling and in this instance, Voter cards will again be used to identify registered voters.

NEC INCLUDES BLIND VOTERS IN THE ELECTION PROCESS

The NEC is enhancing electoral access for citizens with disabilities, as mandated by the Electoral Reform Law of 2004. On October 11, every polling place will be provided with one set of Tactile Ballot Guides, each containing three guides; one for the Presidential, one for Senate and one for House of Representative ballot papers. The NEC has worked with disabled people's organizations and IFES in the design of the Tactile Ballot Guide.

The Tactile Ballot Guide allows the visually impaired voter to mark the ballot paper in secret and without any assistance. It does not use Braille given the high rate of Braille illiteracy in Liberia but relies on ballot position. Voter educators are also targeting visually impaired voters, as well as other voters with disabilities, to educate them on the use of the Tactile Ballot Guide and on the election day procedure in general. The provision of the Tactile Ballot Guide to the NEC has been made possible by IFES, with funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development. Liberia will be the second country in Africa to use a Tactile Ballot Guide for visually impaired voters on a nation-wide basis.

UPDATES

POLITICAL PARTIES

The NEC will hold a special Inter-Party Consultative Committee (IPCC) meeting to update the Chairpersons of Registered Political Parties, Alliances, Coalitions and Independent candidates on Wednesday September 28. This invitation is part of the Commission's ongoing effort to keep Political Parties, alliances, Coalitions and Independent candidates abreast of issues.

TRAINING

In the past week the NEC's training unit has been focused on planning and preparing for the training on tally procedures. A pilot training was conducted on the 23rd of September



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for Upper Montserrado. Trainings on tally procedures for other counties will be conducted from September 27 to October 1.

The second step of the cascade training on Polling and Counting for UNMIL Electoral Support Officers/NEC Election Supervisors has been successfully completed nationwide. Upper Montserrado and Upper Nimba have already started on the third step of the training, which is the training for the presiding officers. All Polling staff will be trained by October 7.

CIVIC EDUCATION

The NEC is intensifying its Civic and Voter Education efforts. In total over 400,000 people have been reached by NEC Civic Educators and other partners at county and community level. 75,000 plastic bags carrying voter education messages are being distributed as are 100,000 stickers and 10,000 rulers emphasizing the importance of electing good leaders.

□ SUMMARY OF QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Asked to comment on the main challenges facing the NEC as election day draws closer, the Chair said the Supreme Court's decision on the marking of the Senatorial ballot poses a major challenge to the Commission. She said with just two weeks to the elections, it is an arduous task for NEC to provide adequate civic education to over 1.35 million registered voters throughout Liberia about any change in the marking of ballots. The Chair cited logistical constraints and the time factor, and added that with the high rate of illiteracy among the Liberian electorate, such a change may result to a high incidence of invalid ballots.

When requested to state what NEC's position was on the Supreme Court's ruling and whether the Commission would comply with the Court's decision, Cllr. Johnson-Morris said NEC respects the authority of the Supreme Court, but the Commission was awaiting a citation from the Lower Court, whose ruling was affirmed by the Supreme Court. The Chair however noted that if implementing this decision might lead to credibility problems for the election process, NEC would have to refer this matter to ECOWAS and the International Contact Group on Liberia (ICGL) – the facilitators of the Liberian peace process.

Regarding reports that NEC had printed 2 million presidential ballots and that some members of the public were raising qualms about the printing of excess ballots, the Chair denied the rumor that NEC had printed 2 million ballots. She clarified that the Commission had printed 1,732,050 presidential ballots, and explained that the excess ballots were needed to account for spoiled ballots resulting from some voters mis-marking their ballots. The Chair said the calculations were based on registration figures rounded up to 50 since the ballots arrive in booklets of 50, with one additional booklet of 50 ballots for each station, plus a 2% buffer added.

In response to a question about whether the NEC was logistically prepared to conduct the elections throughout Liberia including remote or hard-to-reach areas, Cllr. Johnson-



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Morris stated that the elections would be held at all designated polling places throughout the country. She said the NEC will use all available means, air, sea or road, to move election materials to all areas to ensure that all 1.35 million registered voters have the opportunity to vote.

On how NEC communicates with its staff in field locations, the Chair said the Commission uses HF radio and other communication gadgets to keep in touch with its county staff. She however pointed out that most issues at the county level are handled by respective County Magisterial Offices and these do not necessarily have to be brought to NEC Head Quarters in Monrovia.

Asked whether the series of discussions between NEC and IDP leaders had produced any new decision to allow all registered IDPs to vote in all three elections, the Chair restated that the compromise made by NEC was that IDPs who opted to vote in their county of origin but are not repatriated by October 11 will still be able to vote for President/Vice President. To be able to vote for all three elections, IDPs have to be present in the areas for which they registered to vote.

Requested to provide details on the number of IDPs who have registered to vote in their county of origin but have not yet received return assistance, the Chair said the figure is around 24,000. She explained that a total of 61,189 IDPs registered to vote in the elections; out of this number 71% (43,182) opted to vote in their county of origin, and 29% (18,007) opted to vote in the camps. Out of the 43,182 that opted to vote in their county of origin, more than 19,000 have already received return assistance.

Concerning education of voters about the need to keep their Voter Registration cards after the October 11 elections, since they would have to use the same cards in the event of a run-off election for the President/Vice President, the Chair said the Commission has been including that message as part of its civic education efforts. Nevertheless, she conceded that much more civic education needed to be carried out around that issue so that the message can get out to all registered voters.

Asked what the Commission would do about alleged assassination threats against candidates, the Chair said that such threats would violate the Code of Conduct and that. She added that when a matter involving threats of violence is brought to the attention of NEC in the form of a formal complaint, the Commission would address it in line with the election law.
