



Republic of Liberia
National Elections Commission (NEC)



STATEMENT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE NEC

11:00am, November 8, 2005

□ INTRODUCTION

Liberians have once again risen early this morning and made their way to Polling places to cast their vote for the next President of this nation. Polls have been open for three hours throughout the country, and we are pleased to report that thus far, all is well and that the election is taking place in a generally quiet and cooperative atmosphere.

There are currently thousands of Liberians queuing at the 3,070 polling places around the country and the NEC is gratified by the commitment to this last step of the peace process shown by Liberian voters. We hope that as the day stretches out before us, today's exercise will continue to be marked by calm throughout the day.

□ STATUS OF POLLING PLACE OPENINGS

As of 10.30 am today, the NEC has received information from 821 out of the 837 easily accessible sites. The remaining 16 of these voting precincts are pending because the personnel expected to report were involved in a car accident in Grand Bassa County.

Information on the opening of the 311 difficult to reach areas polling precincts will be available later this evening.

The last category of precincts, the inaccessible ones, are 273 of the 1,421 polling precincts. These sites are classified as inaccessible because they are inaccessible by vehicle, and have to be reached by air or on foot. The number of inaccessible sites has increased for this election because of a deterioration in the condition of bridges and roads following the heavy rains of the last few months. The NEC is expecting feedback from these centers between November 9 and 13.

□ DETAILS OF THE PROCESS

In most cases, NEC polling staff opened the doors of their polling stations to receive waiting voters promptly at 8:00 am as scheduled. However in some polling centers there was a slight delay due to the issue of the USD \$5 which poll workers were supposed to have been paid to cover expenses for meals for the October 11 elections. These payments were to be made by all

Magistrates, and poll workers have been assured that the funds will be availed, and have resumed work.

The problems of slow movement of queues which were present in the last election, appear to have abated in this round of elections, and lines have been reported to be moving at a faster pace.

Turn out for this morning appears to be lower than that for October 11. However, after standing in long lines last time, some voters plan to vote later in the day when lines are expected to be shorter. We will only have a better picture of the voter turnout later today and after all the votes have been counted.

Management of voters' entry and processing also appears to have improved in this round, Voters now know where to line up, are more familiar with the signs and can organize themselves better, and polling staff have prior experience from October 11. Notably, the marking of the ballot is easier since there is now only one ballot with 2 Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates, instead of 22. Some voters are also saying they went to the polling place with a candidate in mind already, and as such, didn't have to waste time in the voting booth making their decision.

LNP Officers and polling staff will be casting their vote at the end of the polling, and not at the beginning as had been the procedure for October 11.

In sum, polling is progressing without major difficulties. Voters are appearing with their Voter Registration card to the correct polling place, as required.

TRANSPARENCY

Accredited domestic and international observers and party representatives have been given access to polling places and have clearance to observe all proceedings. Over 3,500 domestic observers are expected to be at polling places. They have been strongly encouraged to monitor the process from beginning to end.

SECURITY

LNP and CIVPOL deployed personnel starting on Sunday October 6, 2005, and most have been in place since yesterday, Monday November 7.

Instructions to Security personnel are that no one is allowed to leave their respective deployment areas without clearance from the Police Commissioner, who gives directions through the area Commander. Security Officers have been instructed not to leave or abandon the Polling Precinct they are assigned to until all Election materials are cleared. Polling staff will be provided Security throughout the duration of the polling and counting. UNMIL and NEC County Electoral staff have been supplied with radios for communication purposes in case of a security emergency.

□ SUMMARY OF QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

In response to a question on Mr. Weah's claims that he received 800,000 votes equaling 62% of the votes, and what effect the Commission thinks this will have on the process, Madam Chair stated that she is surprised Mr. Weah consistently makes statements that could undermine the process.

She stated that his actions indicate that his sincerity is questionable. She added that he must be discouraged from this propaganda, and if it continues the Commission will have to take steps as provided under the Elections Law. These offenses are punishable if it is deemed that they may undermine the process, and jeopardize the security of the state.

Questioned on whether Mr. Weah has made any direct challenge of the October 11 results, the NEC Chair responded that to date Mr. Weah has not filed any challenge to the results, but has instead made reckless statements on radio.

Answering a question on how reporting is to be done for the November 8 election, and whether it would be similar to that in October 11, Cllr. Johnson Morris explained that the results would be released in a similar manner to the October 11 results. She added that results will be released as they are received, not in order of County or any other category.

Replying to a question on what the number of access ballots was for this election and what happened to surplus ballots from the first round, the Chair said that 1.7 million ballots were printed for this round, as was the case for the October 11 elections. She outlined that reporters have the right to follow up on what happened to all October 11 ballots, including the surplus, by checking at the datacenter, and with the county Electoral offices.

In answer to a question on why the enthusiasm of the first round of election had apparently fizzled out, the NEC Chair replied that the enthusiasm of October 11 may be overshadowed by the fact that people may realize that the stakes are higher in this round, and may be reflecting on their choice with more seriousness. She added however, that she had seen people line up early as had been the case for October 11.

On whether the NEC Chair would take blame for the centers that had opened late, due to late payment of polling staff, Madam Chair said that she took the blame when things go wrong and would do also take the credit when things go right.

Concerning the type of mechanism put in place by the NEC to ensure that poll workers will not withhold results due to lack of compensation, Madam Chair answered that the money is available, and had been given to Magistrates who were to disburse the funds through Electoral Support Officers and Electoral Supervisors.

She added that the number of polling staff is large, and while the cash is distributed at a local level, it takes time.

Following up on the apparent lack of enthusiasm on the part of voters, specifically in regards to queuing early and whether people may find themselves unable to vote because they missed the 6pm deadline for polling, Cllr. Johnson-Morris reiterated that the same rules apply as they did for October 11; only people on queue at 6pm will be allowed to vote.

Elaborating on the seriousness of the accident involving poll workers in Grand Bassa County, Madam Chair said the accident had not been a very serious one.

Responding to a question on whether party representatives were able to monitor proceedings in inaccessible areas, the Chair replied that while party representatives have the right to be there, it is not the responsibility of the NEC to get them there.

On a follow up question on whether she knew where party representatives would be, she responded that those were details she did not have on hand, but reiterated that representatives have the right to be there and the Commission had encouraged them to be present.

Asked whether the NEC was aware that a poll worker was arrested for attempting to influence a voter's decision, the NEC Chair stated that the Commission had not been notified, but the matter would be followed up on.
