



Republic of Liberia
National Elections Commission (NEC)



STATEMENT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE NEC

8pm, 11 October 2005

□ INTRODUCTION

The NEC congratulates and thanks the Liberian people for coming out to vote in great numbers, and peacefully casting their ballots. For many, it has been a very long day. The NEC is happy to announce that 1,166 out of 1,421 voting precincts from easily accessible and those precincts considered difficult to access were open today.

The NEC commends Liberians who were determined to exercise their right to vote despite challenging circumstances, especially in those areas where there was rain part of the day, but voters remained in line despite the weather.

We impress on you that counting needs to move forward as successfully as this glorious day did and the NEC will be counting on the support of all Liberians. We anticipate that tonight will be a long night for all of us. I intend to stay for the duration of the night to resolve issues as they arise.

□ STATUS OF POLLING PLACE CLOSURES

The closing time of polling places was 6:00p.m. and the majority of polling places closed at this time, however those voters still in line at closing time were allowed to cast their ballot. Voting precincts handled large numbers of voters in the morning, and polling began slowing down by late afternoon as most people had already cast their vote.

By 7:30 pm we have received and are compiling reports from the 830 easily accessible voting precincts, and the 336 precincts that are considered difficult to access, on whether they have closed all polling places or whether they were still processing voters.

The following counties have closed their polls and commenced counting;

- Bomi
- Bong
- Grand Bassa
- Grand Gedeh
- Margibi
- Nimba
- River Gee

In Montserrado County, there are still voting precincts that remain open since there were still voters in line at 6:00pm.

Information from the other counties is yet to arrive.

From the 255 inaccessible locations, we will not receive news until at least tomorrow.

Once polling is complete, polling staff will conduct counting. Generators and lanterns will provide light for the staff counting the ballots tonight. The process will continue on site until all ballots are counted.

Some polling precincts were forced to keep some of their stations open later due to a combination of factors; logistical problems which caused late openings and thus late closings, and slow moving lines due to slow casting of ballots.

☐ THE POLLING PROCESS

The polling process was reported to have been slow in some instances, and this made some voters impatient. However, the process was smooth overall, which was due to a large extent to the exemplary behaviour of the voters. It was also the product of careful planning and hard work by the entire staff of the NEC, and we want to take this opportunity to congratulate all of them for their efforts.

The NEC would like to pay particular tribute to our county staff, from the 18 County Electoral Magistrates and their teams, their UNMIL counterparts and the nearly 18, 600 polling staff who assisted voters who turned out today. Their dedication and hard work made this election the success that it has been.

☐ INCIDENTS, ARRESTS AND MAJOR DIFFICULTIES

Liberian National Police and UNMIL CivPol have reported that the process has been peaceful overall.

Due to the slow process reported in certain areas, unrest emerged from within the crowds of voters waiting outside a number of large voting precincts. Additional LNP were brought in to maintain order.

A man with a kitchen knife was arrested in Konneh IDP Camp for threatening the life of some people who had formed a queue to cast their votes. He is currently in police custody and will be charged with threatening life.

2 voters from Monrovia fainted from heat exhaustion and were brought to JFK Hospital for treatment.

The military, LNP and CivPol were highly visible in most areas. Shops in most areas were closed. Despite the original deployment plan of 2 LNP officers per voting precincts, some had only one officer deployed to a polling precinct.

❑ **TRANSPARENCY**

International and domestic observers, party and candidate representatives and media have witnessed all stages of polling. We have noticed that Party and Independent candidate representatives were present in large numbers at voting precincts and they are encouraged to remain for the duration of the counting.

❑ **COUNTING PROCESS BEGINS**

As polls close, the NEC polling staff will start the counting process in each polling place, beginning with the Presidential ballots, followed by the Senate and then the House of Representatives. To ensure transparency, accredited domestic and international observers, party representatives, and media may be present throughout the counting process. However no other person apart from the polling staff is allowed to handle any ballot boxes or materials at this stage. Security by LNP will be provided.

In the counting process, the ballots will first be reconciled to verify whether the number of ballots in the ballot box corresponds to the number of ballots issued. For counting of the Presidential ballots and the House of Representatives ballots, the ballots will then be placed in separate stacks for each candidate, and a designated polling staff will read the count aloud, after which the Presiding Officer will do a recount.

The Senate ballots, unlike the Presidential Ballots and the House of Representatives ballots, will not be sorted into piles by candidates because each Senate ballot may have two marks for two different candidates. In counting the Senate ballots, the Presiding Officer will read out the names of the candidates marked on the ballots, and this information will be simultaneously entered into two identical worksheets that will then be compared and filed.

Once the count for the President, Senate, and House of Representatives is completed and all the count forms are filled in and signed by the Presiding Officer and present Party Representatives (if they wish to), a copy of the signed results for that polling place will be displayed at the polling place in plain view. Copies of the count results will also be available for party representatives. The results will then be taken to the county Tally Center for tabulation.

❑ **FINAL REMARKS**

Once again, the people of Liberia can be proud that they have successfully participated in this important step for the future of their country. Today, the counting process has begun, and in the coming days we will know the decision of the people as to who will govern a democratic Liberia.

❑ **SUMMARY OF QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

Commenting on her impression about overall conduct of the polls, the Chair said she rated the process as very successful. She said voters were able to make their choices without interference. The Chair's assessment was buttressed by SRSG Alan Doss who categorized the elections as "a good day for Liberia", and said he was pleased that there had been no incidents of violence during polling. Mr. Doss however said the United Nations would issue an official

position on its assessment of the elections after it has received and analyzed the reports from the observers.

Asked whether it was due to inadequate voter education or inadequate polling staff that the voting process had been very slow in the early hours of polling, the Chair said the 2005 election process, unlike that of 1997, required much more tasks to be performed by poll workers and voters themselves. She said the use of photographs during Voter Registration as part of a voter's details meant that poll workers had to be meticulous in checking that the voter's details on the VR card matched the information on the Final Registration Roll before he/she is allowed to vote. Moreover, because of the high illiteracy rate among voters, poll workers had to explain the process to voters so that they could be able to identify their candidates. The fact that there are three ballots instead of only one also makes the process more time-consuming. The Chair also attributed the delay to the change in instructions regarding the Senate race as a consequence of the late Supreme Court ruling requiring that voters be allowed to choose two senatorial candidates.

Responding to concerns on why the NEC decided to use photographs in these elections when in fact this was costly particularly for a nation emerging from civil war, the Chair said despite the high cost involved the NEC and its international partners preferred this method because it was more reliable. The Chair disclosed that the cost was underwritten by UNMIL.

Mr. Doss, the SRSG, agreed with the Chair that the use of photographs was worthwhile and cost effective.

In response to a question on whether, in the event of a run-off election, the NEC will issue new Voter Registration cards to people who misplace their cards after voting in the first round, the Chair said she does not presume that the Commission will issue new VR cards. She said NEC has been reminding voters to keep their VR cards safe after voting, as these same cards would be needed for a possible run-off. She said that prior to the elections NEC issued replacement cards to voters that had lost their VR cards in an effort to allow as many registered voters as possible the opportunity to participate in the elections. But, the Chair noted, "I don't think we are going to do that perpetually."

Commenting again on the question of excess ballots printed by NEC, the Chair assured that adequate procedures are in place to account for all ballots issued each polling place, including the additional booklets provided to make up for spoiled ballots. She said reconciliation of ballots at the close of polling will ensure that the number of ballots in the ballot box matches the number of ballots issued.

Asked to give an update on the situation at two inaccessible areas in Lofa and Maryland counties where polling had been delayed for hours, the Chair said the poll workers, who had faced difficulties getting into Lobomba (Lofa) because the bridge leading into the town had been washed away by flood, were subsequently flown in by UNMIL helicopter and they have conducted the polling. Also, the Final Registration Roll for Pleebo (Maryland) had eventually been sorted out and polling has taken place.

Asked whether the media was free to report preliminary results of the elections, the Chair emphasized that only the NEC can provide official election results. She said once the NEC provides such information to the media they may announce these results. She indicated that the NEC would begin to provide some preliminary results by Wednesday, October 12.
