



Republic of Liberia
National Elections Commission (NEC)



STATEMENT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE NEC

11am, October 11 2005

□ INTRODUCTION

The historic moment has come for the voters to elect the next government for a democratic Liberia. Polls have been open for three hours throughout the country, and we are immensely pleased to report that all is well and that the election is taking place in a generally calm and peaceful atmosphere.

Many people rose as early as midnight, went to claim their space in the queue and have been in line since before sunrise. There are currently thousands of Liberians queuing at the 3,070 polling places around the country. The NEC welcomes this clear demonstration of enthusiasm and participation in this important step in Liberia's democratic process.

□ STATUS OF POLLING PLACE OPENINGS

As of 10.30 am today, the NEC has received information from 830 out of the 1,421 polling precincts. These precincts are classified as the most easily accessible, allowing easy transmission of information. Information from 336 more of the 1,421 polling precincts will be available by 19:00hrs tonight, as these are considered difficult to reach areas transmission of information will take a longer period of time to arrive in Monrovia.

The last category of precincts, the inaccessible ones are 255 of the 1,421 polling precincts. The NEC is expecting feedback from these centers between October 12 and 15.

Out of the 830 centers which have reported as of now, only 2 centers are not open. One of these centers is located in Lobomba in Lofa County. This polling precinct has 30 voters registered to vote there and UNMIL is sending a helicopter to assist the polling staff who have not been able to cross the river. This Polling place is expected to open within the next two hours. The other polling place is in Pleebo, Maryland County. This delay is caused by the delivery of an incorrect FRR. The correct FRR is being delivered and the Polling place will open within the hour.

□ 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 of up to 30 minutes due to logistical problems, such as Final Registration Roll being delivered to an incorrect polling place within a Polling precinct, in which case the polling places quickly swapped the FRRs and proceeded to assist voters.

Of concern to the NEC today has been the slow movement of lines. To speed up the process the NEC has issued the following revisions to the voting procedures;

- 1. Ballot Paper Issuer to stop applying the "you may vote twice" Senate sticker. Instead, use the felt pen to cross out the current instruction "Put a mark in the box of your choice." Instruct the voters verbally that they may mark two boxes if they wish.**
- 2. The Ballot Paper Issuer to stop pre-folding the ballots. Voters should fold the ballots any way they wish.**
- 3. Please affix the sample marking the ballot signs (that show two marks for the Senate ballots) inside all voting screens. Reports are that they have not been placed there in some cases.**

To accommodate Party Representatives and make the process more transparent, the following instruction has also been issued today;

- 4. Party representatives should be allowed enter the polling place even if the number of the precinct on their accreditation does not correspond to the precinct code they wish to enter. However, no more than one party representative per party (or independent candidate) should be in a polling place at any one time.**

These instructions are being sent out jointly by NEC/UNMIL to the county Electoral teams.

Overall, Polling is going without difficulties. Most voters are appearing with their Voter Registration card to the correct polling place, as required.

Polling staff seem to be doing an excellent job so far. They will be working long hours today as the counting may go to midnight.

TRANSPARENCY

The NEC Magistrates have also confirmed that thousands of observers, Party/Independent candidate representatives, and media have been present at polling places since before opening time and have been monitoring that voters are allowed to make their choices freely and in the secrecy of the voting booth. Accredited observers have been given access to polling places and have been able to observe without restriction from electoral staff.

SECURITY

Difficulties in controlling eager masses who have been standing for hours have been witnessed in some polling places. however no major incidents of disturbance or problems with the polling have been brought to the NEC's attention.

The NEC headquarters and County Electoral Offices will remain in constant contact with LNP, CivPol and UNMIL Military commanders to continue monitoring the day's happenings closely.

Security personnel will maintain contact with polling precincts, keeping in place safety measures as necessary to ensure that all eligible voters who want to participate in this important election are able to do so in a safe environment.

☐ SECURITY AND SAFETY OF PERSONNEL

We are saddened to announce that on October 9, a UN vehicle conveying EU election observers to the counties was involved in a fatal accident with a private car on the Tubmanburg-Monrovia highway. One passenger in the private car died on the spot while two observers who sustained minor injuries were treated and discharged.

☐ IDPS

The NEC is pleased to note that IDPs have been participating in the process, despite threats to boycott the elections. We hope IDPs who did not make it home, will feel some gratification in the fact that they were able to participate in the Election of the next President of Liberia, which is indeed very important.

☐ SUMMARY OF QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

In response to a question on whether polling will still close at 6:00pm, and whether those in line after 6:00pm will be allowed to cast their ballot, the NEC Chair stated that anyone who is in line by close of polling will be allowed to vote, even if it has to be done at night. The NEC Chair clarified that this does not mean that polling will go on indefinitely, but that anyone in line by 6:00pm is entitled to vote.

In reply to a question as to why the NEC decided to conduct the election during rainy season, C'lr. Frances Johnson-Morris stated that the date for the election is stated in the Constitution of Liberia, thus holding the Election on October 11 was not decided by the NEC.

Answering a question on how the NEC is keeping in contact and receiving information from its county staff, the Chair responded that the Headquarters is using various means of communication, namely phone, e-mail and HF radio. She explained that the magistrates and UNMIL Electoral staff in all counties are able to contact the NEC HQ to give status reports and immediately attend to arising problems.

In relation to a question on whether there have been any incidents of violence, the NEC Chair stated that the Commission has not been notified of any, and the reports received from the field have been of calm and peace.

To address a question on whether security personnel will stay on past 6:00pm, the NEC Chair affirmed that security would be there to ensure that all processes of the vote are conducted

peacefully, and will stay at the polling place for as long as required, even for the Counting if necessary.

As clarification on why the NEC made adjustments on the accessibility of Party and Independent Candidate representatives to polling places, Madam Chair responded that the adjustment was put in place to make the process easier, and was in line with the decision to allow Magistrates to issue accreditation badges as well. She explained that the Commission recognized that Representatives may not be able to get accredited in Monrovia and were thus offered the opportunity to obtain accreditation in the county. In the same way, Representatives are now being allowed to enter a polling place even if the number of the precinct on their accreditation badges does not correspond to the precinct code they wish to enter.

In response to a question on why voters at a specific center on Bushrod Island are being asked to abandon the lines they are in, to join other queues, causing inconvenience, the NEC Chair replied that during voter registration large numbers of registrants turned up and in some instances some polling places surpassed the limit of 500 registrants per center. Now on polling day, these huge numbers of voters have to be divided into manageable lines in order to allow them to be processed. People are not being turned away or sent to a new location, merely requested to join different lines within the same voting precinct. However the NEC Chair stated that it was unfortunate that some people would lose their place as they joined the line designated to their VR card number, but they would still be able to vote.

When replying to a question on a CDC Party Representatives' complaint in regards to access to a polling place in Ganta, Madam Chair reiterated that the decision to revise procedures for access would resolve this matter.

In response to a question on what the main problems were behind late opening of centers, the NEC Chair replied that the problems had been mainly logistical but that most polling places had been operating efficiently so far, and that she was impressed with the work performed by polling staff.

Madam Chair confirmed to the media that the revised procedures on marking of the senatorial ballot and access for Party and Candidate Representatives had been sent out to the field already.
