



EC Bi-Lateral Elections Programme in Liberia

INTERIM STATEMENT - 8 November, 2005 **European Commission Bilateral Elections Programme in Liberia** **Civil Society Partners Domestic Observation Programme**

This is a joint interim statement from the Civil Society Organisation (CSO) Partners who performed Election Day Domestic Observation under the umbrella of the European Commission Bilateral Elections Programme in Liberia¹ for the 8th November 2005 Run-Off Election. For this phase, the group comprises the following Organisations working through 493 locally recruited Observers in Bomi, Bong, Lofa, Maryland, Margibi and Montserrado Counties:

- Association of Disabled Female International (ADFI)
- Collaboration of Churches in Bong (COCB);
- Equipping Youth To Help One Another (EQUIP);
- Justice and Peace Commission (JPC);
- Lutheran Trauma Healing and Reconciliation Programme (LTHRP); and
- Resource Centre for Community Empowerment and Integrated Development (RECEIVE).

The Observers' remit has been: *To evaluate in selected locations the extent to which the elections were free, fair and inclusive; and to issue an interim statement and subsequent recommendations based on collated observation reports.*

Observation will continue throughout the tabulation phase up to formal announcement of results. A final statement will be issued on the entire election process once it is complete, taking into consideration the procedures followed in resolving complaints.

Administrative and Procedural Aspects of the Election

Observer reports received to date show that citizens were able to exercise their right to vote during the 8 November Run-Off Election, and that the voting process was generally carried out as planned and in an atmosphere of calm.

Once again, materials were delivered on time and in sufficient quantities and the various stages of the process were followed as per the regulations. It is also clear that the procedure was considerably faster than for the October 11 Election.

Turnout appears at this stage to have been around 60% - a commendable figure that once again demonstrates the Liberian people's commitment to democracy and a peaceful future. The long morning queues of October 11 were replaced by a steady flow of voters throughout the day and we commend the NEC for its smooth coordination of the process.

We would, however, like to draw the attention of the authorities to a number of minor difficulties and limitations observed on Election Day, which might warrant future attention.

¹The EC Bilateral Elections Programme in Liberia is implemented jointly by Electoral Reform International Services (ERIS) and The Carter Centre UK (CC-UK).





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We reiterate our recommendation for long-term voter education, which would have a positive impact on voters' ability to vote without assistance.

Summary of Recommendations:

- *Explanations: We recommend for clear explanations of the voting process to be given in both English and (if appropriate) the local vernacular, possibly using a guide for appropriate instructional phrases to allay concerns over impartiality.*
- *Long-term voter education: We recommend investment in long-term education to increase familiarity with voting processes. It is also clear that reducing illiteracy will have a positive impact on these difficulties.*

Counting

The counting process generally proceeded according to expectations and Presiding Officers showed welcome concern for ensuring the intention of the voter was recognised and respected. We commend the NEC for ensuring that Observers were invited to stand close by and were given the opportunity to confirm for themselves the decisions of the Officials – particularly with regard to invalid ballots. However, poor lighting and a tendency for voters to mark over the photographs of the candidates meant that difficulties in determining the intention of the voter persisted. Given this difficulty, once again we recommend the use of a thicker and darker pen for marking the ballots.

Summary of Recommendations:

- *Marking: We recommend the use of a darker and thicker pen for marking ballots to make markings more visible in poor light and ease confusion during the counting process.*

Observers and party poll representatives

Party poll representatives from both CDC and UP were present in the vast majority of polling stations visited and played an active role in protecting the interests of their parties. Observers from other groups – both domestic and international – were also present in most stations.

Observers and party poll representatives were granted access to all aspects of the electoral process. Our Observers were well received and well treated by NEC officials. We commend the NEC for ensuring that election officials had a much clearer concept of the role of these two groups, and for making concerted efforts to provide them with adequate access and information, and to respond to any concerns they may have expressed.

Media

Our Observers have reported media presence at a significant number of polling stations and we commend the media for their responsible behaviour on Election Day. We hope that these members of the Liberian and International media continue to report in an impartial and responsible manner.

Violations – Campaigning and violence

Once again we are delighted to report that no incidents of campaigning on Election Day were witnessed by our Observers. Similarly, Observers reported that voting took place in an atmosphere that was generally peaceful and secure, with only isolated minor disturbances – a considerable achievement for a post-war transition election.





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1) Voting

The stages of the voting process were generally completed according to the regulations. The only minor inconsistencies reported related to the inking process, with some confusion over whether the right or left index finger should be inked, and some voters not checked for ink before being allowed to vote.

Our Observers noted that a lot fewer voters experienced difficulties with voting on November 8 as compared with October 11 and this observation is borne out by the speed of the process and by reduced preliminary figures for invalid ballots. Such a change is partly attributable to a simpler voting process with one ballot paper instead of three and to voter familiarity with the process gained through participation on October 11.

In addition, we commend the NEC for the use of larger photographs on the ballot paper. Our Observers also commented favourably on the display of enlarged copies of the ballot outside the screens. It is important, however, that these copies are placed where they can be monitored to avoid opportunist individuals from marking their choice and thereby influencing other voters.

We also appreciate the efforts of the NEC, CSOs and other stakeholders in providing education to voters on the Run-Off, and we continue to recommend investment in long-term education to increase familiarity with the voting process.

Finally, practical difficulties associated with locations for polling stations persist, such as inadequate space to move, poor lighting (even during the day) and inadequate disabled access. Our Observers also report a few cases in which minor concerns over the secrecy of the vote were generated by problems of location such as the positioning of screens. Once again we acknowledge current limitations but encourage the authorities to consider this issue on future occasions

Summary of Recommendations:

- *Location: While recognising the poor infrastructure available to the NEC for polling locations, we sincerely hope that more appropriate locations will be available for use during future elections. We particularly recommend seeking out larger rooms with better lighting, considering disabled access and taking into consideration possible poor weather and its impact on queuing.*

Assistance to the voter

In light of our concerns expressed in our Interim Statement after October 11, we commend the NEC for its decision to no longer allow Presiding Officers to assist voters. Our Observers note that in many cases voters cast their ballots unassisted without difficulty or benefited from the assistance of a relative or friend.

It appears, however, that some problems were caused by voters who required assistance but had not brought an 'assistant' with them. These difficulties were exacerbated by the fact that ballot paper issuers had been instructed not to speak to voters. While we recognise concerns over the impartiality of the advice given, we stand by our earlier recommendation for clear explanations to be given in both English and (if appropriate) the local vernacular. We suggest that the distribution of a sheet listing instructional phrases to be used would resolve any questions over impartiality.





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Decision-making and Communication

It was noted that some of the decisions made by NEC were not implemented consistently throughout the country – for example the decision that ballot paper issuers should not speak to voters. While we appreciate the difficulties of communication, particularly in remote areas, we urge the NEC to work on ways around these difficulties and to incorporate lead-time to allow for dissemination of such information.

Summary of Recommendations:

- *While we appreciate the difficulties of communication, particularly in remote areas, we urge the NEC to work on ways around these difficulties and to incorporate lead-time to allow for dissemination of such information.*

Conclusion

Once again the CSO Partners express their overall satisfaction with the election process, and commend the Liberian people and the political parties for the responsible manner in which they helped make both October 11 and November 8 Election Days resounding successes. Our congratulations go also to the NEC and its international partners for their successful management of the process.



CENTRAL ELECTION COMMISSION
Liberia





EC Bi-Lateral Elections Programme in Liberia

PRESS RELEASE – European Commission Bilateral Elections Programme in Liberia – Civil Society Partners Domestic Observation

This is a joint interim statement from the Civil Society Organisation (CSO) Partners who performed the Run-off Presidential Election Day Domestic Observation under the umbrella of the European Commission Bilateral Elections Programme in Liberia¹ for the 8th November 2005 Run-off Elections. Our group comprises the following Organisations working through locally recruited Observers in Bomi, Bong, Lofa, Maryland, Margibi and Mont'serrado Counties:

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Our remit has been: *To evaluate in selected locations the extent to which the elections were free, fair and inclusive; and to issue an interim statement and subsequent recommendations based on collated observation reports.*

Observation will continue throughout the tabulation phase up to announcement of results. A final statement will be issued once the process is complete, taking into consideration the procedures followed in resolving complaints.

Reports from our Observers have been positive with regard to the conduct of the election process. There were minor and isolated incidents that were noted that will be communicated in our detailed report that have no significant effect on the overall process. We wish to commend the Liberian people and the political parties for the responsible manner in which they helped make the Run-off Election Day a success.

We, the CSO Partners, noted with interest that though there was a slight drop in the turnout of voters on the run-off election day, it was still high enough to indicate the enthusiasm with which Liberians have accepted a democratic way of electing their leadership. Though there were shorter queues compared to the October 11 Elections, voters kept flowing in to polling precincts throughout the day.

Our congratulations go to the NEC and its international partners for their successful management of the process. We would like at this stage to register our appreciation to NEC for taking on board some of the recommendations that were conveyed in our last statement. We hope more will be done to address the other concerns that are to be conveyed in our statement and final report covering the October 11 and November 8 polls.

Through the impressive participation in the Run-off election process, Liberians are once again reiterating that they have put the war behind them. What they need is a responsible leadership that will endeavour to unify the Liberian society without discrimination and start to address the pressing concerns of all citizens.

It is the expectation of the CSO partners that NEC will embark on and sustain efforts to improve the election process by taking on board the views of local and international stakeholders, in order to maintain and enhance its credibility and that of the process.

The incoming government is also requested to provide the support needed to NEC in order to guarantee the delivery of credible elections in future. This is a sure way of saving Liberia from sliding back to anarchy.

Finally, we reiterate our congratulations to the Liberian people for a highly successful Election and we express our hopes for a peaceful, prosperous and democratic future for Liberia.

November 11, 2005

¹ The EC Bilateral Elections Programme in Liberia is implemented jointly by Electoral Reform International Services (ERIS) and The Carter Centre UK (CC-UK).

