



Visions In Action

volunteers in international development

2710 Ontario Road NW, Washington DC 20009

Tel: 202-625-7402 Fax: 202-588-9344

Email: visions@visionsinaction.org

www.visionsinaction.org

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Liberia Election Observer Delegation Statement

Visions in Action, an international nonprofit development & volunteer organization based in Washington DC, fielded a team of international and local observers to observe the October 11th and November 8th Liberia elections.

On November 8th, the VIA team observed voting and counting for the Runoff Presidential Election in five counties: Nimba, Bong, Margibi, Grand Bassa and Montserrado. The team observed the electoral process in 19 voting precincts encompassing 75 polling stations. In general, the team found the electoral process to be free, fair and transparent.

The electoral staff was well-trained, efficient, and knowledgeable regarding polling procedures. A significant improvement was made in the way lines of voters were handled in the November election as compared to the October election. Most polling staff took the time to clearly explain to illiterate voters the importance of placing their thumbprint clearly in one square, a step that should reduce the number of invalid votes. Adequate materials were present at most stations, though some of them were short on ink pads in that not all voting screens had one. However, this did not cause undue delay.

Liberian election observers were present at all the voting precincts visited. In all cases, security was provided by the Liberia National Police, and in many of the larger precincts, additional security was provided by UNMIL. In most, but not all polling stations, party observers were present. Voting was calm and orderly, and proceeded much more quickly than in the October elections. The lack of long lines caused some to conclude that the turnout was low; however, we found the turnout to be significant, at greater than 50%, especially in the rural towns of Ganta, Gbarnga, Kakata and Monrovia. Turnout was lowest in the small, rural polling precincts. In particular, there was extremely low turnout at the IDP camps in Bong and Margibi; one polling station registered a 2% turnout at 4:00pm.

The counting process went smoothly and quickly, at the polling stations observed and at the one county tally center visited in Montserrado. At one precinct on Mamba Point, there was some initial confusion involving members of one of the parties who insisted that they should receive the TEEs (Tamper Evident Envelopes). However, the NEC staff made it clear that the TEEs were to be transported to the Montserrado Tally Center in Virginia, which in fact occurred.

The only complaint aired involved the placement of party representatives at polling places in Totota, Bong County. One of the parties felt that the party reps were sitting too far from the polling station staff member in charge of verifying voter's ID cards and marking them on the register. The problem was resolved when the Presiding Officers offered that the party representatives could stand directly behind the polling staff member in clear view of the voters' ID cards and the printed voter registry.

VIA recommends that the polling staff be retained and employed in future elections, as it is clear that a tremendous effort was made to hire and train competent polling station staff. More thought needs to be given to the ways in which the "inaccessible stations" are observed and report their results, and as communication improves it may be possible to phone in preliminary results from most outlying areas to arrive at a conclusion more quickly.

Visions in Action would like to congratulate the National Elections Commission and the Liberian people on an electoral process that was clearly free, fair, transparent and devoid of serious violence. VIA urges all parties to accept the results and join hands in collectively moving forward in the rebuilding of Liberia.

Background: Visions in Action has worked in ten countries in Africa and Latin America since 1989, placing skilled volunteers in a variety of fields, including education, journalism, democracy & governance and human rights. Visions in Action electoral teams have observed national elections in South Africa, Malawi, Tanzania, Kenya and Liberia over the past 12 years. VIA has worked in Liberia since 2002.

For more information:

Shaun Skelton

Director

Cell: 06-538593

shaun@visionsinaction.org