



PRELIMINARY DECLARATION

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In pursuance of the provisions of the ECOWAS 2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, and within the framework of the Programme of Assistance to Member States organizing elections, the President of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), **H.E. Jean-Claude Kassi Brou**, deployed an Election Observation Mission (EOM) to observe the general elections in the Republic of Sierra Leone on 7 March, 2018.
2. The Mission, made up of 15 Long Term Observers (LTO) and 55 Short term Observers (STO), includes delegations drawn from the West African Ambassadors accredited to Abuja, and the ECOWAS Community Parliament. It also includes experts drawn from the relevant Ministries and Electoral Management Bodies of Member States, Civil Society Organizations, Experts from the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) and the Media. It is led by **His Excellency, Amos C. Sawyer**, Former interim President of the Republic of Liberia, and supported by the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security of the ECOWAS Commission, **General Francis A. Behanzin** and a technical team from the Commission.

II. BACKGROUND TO THE GENERAL ELECTIONS

3. Sierra Leone has organized for the second time in its history, general elections in which four (4) different elections (Presidential, Parliamentary, Chairperson/Mayoral and Local Council) are held simultaneously. The 7 March, 2018 elections represent another major milestone in the consolidation of democracy in Sierra Leone. These elections constitute the fourth consecutive one since the over a decade-long conflict ended in 2002 and serve

as an important benchmark, both in the consolidation of peace and democracy, and also as a means of demonstrating the maturity of political leadership and institutions over the years.

4. This year's elections are the first time that authorities in the country are entirely responsible for the electoral process following the departure of the UN Mission in 2014. It is also the second time that an incumbent President, having exhausted the maximum two five-year tenure, is not taking part in the polls.
5. Against this backdrop and on the basis of the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance; the African Charter on Democracy and Governance; the International Declaration on the Principles of Election Observation and the relevant legal texts guiding electoral processes in the Republic of Sierra Leone, the ECOWAS EOM's main objective was to ensure a credible and peaceful electoral process and to support the people of Sierra Leone in her efforts to deepen her young democracy.

III. PRE-ELECTORAL ENGAGEMENTS AND ECOWAS SUPPORT TO THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

6. Prior to the deployment of the ECOWAS Observation Mission, through its Early Warning and Response Mechanism, ECOWAS extensively engaged various actors and closely monitored the political situation and day-to-day developments in Sierra Leone, particularly regarding the electoral processes. Given the stakes involved in these elections and the high political intolerance that prevailed during the pre-election process and in reaffirming the ECOWAS Community's strong support to the promotion of democratic principles throughout the region and its unwavering commitment to the holding of credible, transparent and peaceful elections, the ECOWAS Commission systematically deployed a number of timely missions.
7. ECOWAS interventions in the preparation of the electoral process include the following:
 - ✓ A deployment of Needs Assessment Mission to Sierra Leone in July 2017, which resulted in the pledge of logistical support towards ensuring successful conduct of the March 7, 2018 elections and the consolidation of peace and democracy in the country;
 - ✓ A deployment of a Joint-High Level ECOWAS-AU-UN Mission to Sierra Leone in November, 2017;
 - ✓ A deployment of a Pre-Election Fact-finding Mission to Sierra Leone early February, 2018 to assess the institutional and legal framework under which the election are to be organised;

- ✓ Training workshops on dialogue and mediation in elections-related disputes targeting civil society, faith-based organisations and local peace actors between November 2017 and March 2018.
8. In the build up to the elections, the ECOWAS Commission undertook the following interventions:
- ✓ The deployment of a 15 members Long-Term Election Observer Mission (LTEOM) from **18 February to 17 March, 2018** which includes legal, political, media, gender and conflict prevention, as well as election operation experts to observe the most critical phases of the electoral process. The LTEOM will help create an atmosphere of public trust and also contribute to the prevention or management of election related conflicts;
 - ✓ The Commission also provided **\$750,000** as financial assistance to the Government of Sierra Leone for the implementation of training, awareness and civic education activities;

In addition to the above-highlighted efforts, the Commission also deployed the Head of the ECOWAS Observation Mission, **His Excellency, Professor Amos C. Sawyer**, to observe the signing of the Presidential Peace Pledge (the 2018 Freetown Declaration) under the auspices of the Political Party Registration Commission (PPRC) and its Eminent Persons Group (EPG), a ceremony that took place on 28 February 2018.

IV. ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN

9. The electoral campaigns kicked off on 5 February, 2018 and the overall electioneering campaign phases were colorful, enthusiastic, and boisterous. They passed off peacefully without any major incidents, a situation made possible by the holding of political party rallies and campaigns on alternate days as per the electoral calendar and under the vigilance of the security agencies.
10. Except in a few cases, the media was polarized, partisan, and intemperate, reflecting the sharp Red Green divide of the country's political landscape between the All Peoples Congress (APC) and the Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP). However, the Cooling-Off Day, 6 March, 2018 was generally observed.

V. ARRIVAL, COMMENCEMENT OF CONSULTATIONS & DEPLOYMENT

11. Upon arrival in the country, the Head of Mission, **His Excellency, Professor Amos C. Sawyer**, held extensive consultations with various parties, institutions, Presidential candidates, the Supreme Court, and other stakeholders involved in the electoral process. The Head of Mission also met with the National Election Commission (NEC) Chairman and his colleagues, as well as the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) and was briefed about the preparedness of the electoral process and efforts made by the authorities for successful elections. The Head of Mission also paid a courtesy visit to the President of the Republic, His Excellency, Ernest Bai Koroma.
12. The various consultations enabled the Mission to note some concerns including, among others (i) the series of court cases bordering around the dual nationality issues and (ii) concerns expressed by political parties and other stakeholders over the restrictions on vehicular movements on election day.
13. The ECOWAS Head of Mission joined other five Heads of the International Election Observation Missions (IEOMs) present in Sierra Leone to issue a joint-Communiqué on 6 March, 2018, that called on all political leaders, parties and their supporters to ensure peaceful elections and respect for the rule of law throughout the election process. They further called on the NEC and party polling agents to conduct their duties in a professional manner.
14. Following a briefing and orientation session held on 5 March 2018, the 55 members of the ECOWAS Short Term Observer (STO) were fully equipped and deployed throughout the regions of the country. While in the field, observers maintained permanent contact with the Mission Situation Room based in Freetown and with other international and local observer's missions to collect and consolidate information related to the voting.

VI. OBSERVATION OF THE ELECTIONS

Preliminary Observations and Recommendations

15. Having analyzed information and reports from various teams in the field, and after a debriefing session with returning observers, the ECOWAS Observer Mission to the 2018 General Elections in Sierra Leone wishes to make a Preliminary Declaration on the developments on Election Day, 7 March 2018, as follows:

A- Opening, conduct of the election and vote counting

- i. **On Election Day**, voters were observed in teeming numbers at the polling centers long before the official poll opening time of 7:00 am. Several of them had arrived as early as 4:00 am.
- ii. The demographic spread among the voters showed a predominance of women and youth.
- iii. There was visible presence of security agents at most of the polling centers observed. Security was provided by the Sierra Leone Police, supplemented by the Immigration forces, Fire and corrections Services, prisons and other para-security agencies. Our observers however noted that whereas there was at least one static security officer at most polling stations, in other polling centers the security officers were on mobile patrol moving from one center to another.
- iv. Overall, the political parties and their followers respected the prohibition of the display of party colors and symbols on Election Day.
- v. The vehicular restrictions put in place on Election Day, including manned check-points around Freetown and other cities, improved electoral security, even though they constrained the ability of some voters to exercise their franchise.
- vi. In the main, polling officials were on the scene at most of the polling centers in advance of the official opening time.
- vii. Party agents of the APC, NGC and SLPP were present at the opening of polls at all the polling stations observed. In addition, some other agents of between one and three other political parties were present in many stations, in particular the People's Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC), Coalition for Change (C4C) and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA).
- viii. Essential electoral materials were in place in most of the polling centers observed, and the polls opened within 30 minutes of the official opening time of 7:00 am.

- ix. At the centers visited during the opening of polls, Polling Officials struggled to maintain order due to a combination of insufficient numbers of Queue Controllers, and the influx and enthusiasm of voters; the situation however improved gradually with time.
- x. Even though some arrangements were made in polling stations to facilitate and ease the voting of certain individuals such as the physically challenged, the aged, pregnant and lactating mothers, in some centers, these were not in place, as such persons encountered difficulties in accessing polling stations in some places.
- xi. Despite the challenges, voters exhibited maximum patience and perseverance in their determination to exercise their civic rights and responsibilities.
- xii. The voting process was slow in the beginning, complicated by the sheer number of elections being conducted. However, as the polling officials warmed to the task, the pace quickened.
- xiii. The polling officials demonstrated adequate professionalism in carrying out their duties while party agents ably watched over their party and candidates' interests.
- xiv. International and local observers were present in most polling centers visited. These included, besides ECOWAS observers, African Union (AU), the Commonwealth, the European Union, Carter Centre and EISA. Effective presence of Local Observers was also recorded, led by the National Elections Watch (NEW), WANEP and Catholic Mission.
- xv. On the whole, the voting process took place in an orderly, transparent and professional manner, and secrecy of the ballot was in general ensured.
- xvi. In most polling stations observed, the polls closed at the official time of 5:00 pm, because most voters left home very early in the morning to exercise their franchise, in addition to the fact that the number of voters per each station was limited to 300 on the register.
- xvii. The sorting, counting, tallying, and reconciliation of the ballot, as well as the declaration and certification of results at the polling stations, were carried

out in a professional, transparent and credible manner, and under the watch of party agents and observers.

B- Challenges Observed

16. Beside the deficiencies noted above, the ECOWAS Observer Mission also noted a few isolated incidents that could have marred the smooth and peaceful conduct of the polls, include the following:

- i. The restriction on vehicular movement has proved to be a challenge in many areas observed. For instance, while at a polling Centre in Malai, (Centre 69/247/10118), observers in Port Loko District met a crowd of stranded voters who are registered to vote in Katongha (Centre 69/248/10127) and Makoberay (Centre 69/248/10128) but could not get there because of the restriction; (while reporting).
- ii. In Kenema, observers witnessed cases of some voters who were intimidated by the presence of heavily armed military men, as a result of which some of the aged voters had to leave the queue for home, out of fear.
- iii. In some polling stations, pressure from impatient voters coupled with the absence of sufficient security presence created chaos. For instance, at E.B. Williams Municipal School, Jomo Kenyatta Road (Centre 16179) in Western Area Urban, polling agents momentarily closed the polling station while awaiting the arrival of security agents.
- iv. The SLPP's results collation centre in the Godrich area of Freetown was besieged for over five hours by agents of the Sierra Leone Police who alleged that there were hacking equipment in the premises to intercept NEC information. Even though this incidence was eventually resolved, the ECOWAS Mission hopes that in future incident of this nature will be dealt with carefully.
- v. It is the view of the ECOWAS Observer Mission that these inadequacies observed do not diminish the transparency, fairness or the credibility of the electoral process at this point in time.

C. Preliminary Conclusions and Recommendations

17. In light of the preceding observations and analysis, the ECOWAS Observer Mission to the 2018 General Elections wishes to make the following preliminary conclusions:

- i. The preparation of the 2018 elections, the conduct of the electioneering campaign, as well as the processes on Election Day, up until the release of the results of the four elections by the responsible officials at the polling stations, **were free, fair, and credible**. The vast majority of the qualified Sierra Leonean population, who wished to do so, was provided the required space to exercise their constitutional rights to vote or to be voted for.
- ii. The ECOWAS Observer Mission will continue to closely monitor the concluding phases of the electoral process, in particular the transmission of the electoral results and supporting materials to the National Tallying Center, as well as the processing and declaration of provisional results, and will make further declarations where and when appropriate.
- iii. The ECOWAS Observer Mission warmly congratulates the peace-loving people of Sierra Leone, particularly the political leaders, their followers, and the electorate in general, for the tenacity, determination, sense of moderation and patriotism demonstrated in their quest for democracy and development. The Mission wishes to commend the National Electoral Commission, the security agencies and all stakeholders for their invaluable contribution to the success so far achieved, and urges them to pursue the process to its logical conclusion with the same determination and commitment.
- iv. At this juncture, the ECOWAS Mission would like to caution individuals and groups, in particular the political parties, the media and civil society organizations, to refrain from speculating on or declaring unofficial results until they are officially declared. In this regard, the Mission urges the National Electoral Commission to come out with the provisional results as soon as possible.
- v. The Mission calls on all candidates and their supporters to continue to respect due process and the rule of law at all times. Given the individual and collective responsibility for the success of the process, the Mission urges all to resort only to legal means to seek redress of any grievances emanating from the electoral process.

- vi. Regarding the need for further strengthen the electoral process in Sierra Leone, the ECOWAS Observer Mission wishes to recommend to the incoming Government, the National Electoral Commission, and all other relevant stakeholders, to prioritize voter education and strengthen the electoral infrastructure in the country, and also endeavor to review the restrictions on vehicular movement on election day. The Mission also wishes to urge the in-coming Parliament to take a look at the issue of dual nationality and revisit the affirmative action bill on women participation in politics.

- vii. ECOWAS wishes to congratulate the people of Sierra Leone for their exemplary comportment up to this point.

Done at Freetown, this 8th Day of March 2018
The Head of the ECOWAS Mission