



NATIONAL ELECTION WATCH (NEW)

A Coalition of Civic and Nongovernmental Organizations

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Preliminary statement on opening procedures

Freetown, 17th November 2012 - National Elections Watch (NEW) has deployed over 9000 observers in all 14 districts of Sierra Leone to cover the 9493 polling stations for the November 17th, 2012 Presidential, Parliamentary, and Local government elections process. From the data currently available from its observers, NEW considers the poll opening procedure to have been relatively good on a nationwide basis. However, NEW expresses concern at significant delays in opening at many polling stations.

As of 12.30 p.m., from data on 888 polling stations, 73% had opened by 7.15, as scheduled. This is adjudged to be satisfactory, though NEW has serious concerns about long delays in many polling stations. As of the time of writing (1 p.m.), there are reports that at least 4 polling stations have still not opened. Other opening procedures were judged to be relatively good: out of 889 polling stations reporting, 87% nationally had security personnel present at opening time, as required by the electoral regulations. Out of 900 stations reporting data, 83% of stations had at least 6 NEC officials present (out of the 8 stipulated) to oversee the process. However, NEW notes with concern that 15 stations observed had *no* officials present at opening time. Approximately 91% of 887 polling stations reporting had all the necessary voting equipment and materials: ballot papers, voting booths or screens, ballot boxes, indelible ink, voter lists, and embossing devices.

The data available from 823 polling stations also indicates that observers considered that in the vast majority of cases (91%) the polling locations were suitable - that is they were not too far for voters, had shelter from sun and rain, and were accessible to disabled people. Also, out of 824 polling stations observed, in 89% of cases the layout of the station was adjudged to be well-organized; so that voters could vote without anyone watching; NEC staff could see everything clearly, observers were able to observe the process; and there was a smooth flow of the voting process. However, NEW has received complaints on a nationwide basis about the structure of the voting booths and overcrowding at polling stations which may compromise the confidentiality of the voter.

NEW is a coalition of civil society and Non-governmental organizations observing elections in Sierra Leone. We will continue to report to the people of Sierra Leone as the voting progresses

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