



NATIONAL ELECTION WATCH (NEW)

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Preliminary Statement on Voting Procedures

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Voting has ended across Sierra Leone's 14 districts for Presidential, Parliamentary, and Local Government elections. National Election Watch's (NEW) observers continue to monitor the process across the country. Overall, the statistics on voting procedures are positive, though there have been a few incidents of significant concern.

With polling scheduled to close at 5 PM, as of 4.45 PM, out of 1139 polling stations where NEW observers reported, 97.7% indicated that **voter confirmation procedures** had been properly followed. In the 26 reporting stations where procedure was not followed, the most notable faults were that: in 14 cases, voters with ID cards from other polling stations were allowed to vote; in 9 cases, voter cards were not adequately embossed; and in 7 cases, voters without ID cards and who were not on the register were allowed to vote.

With regards to these issues in the confirmation procedures, NEW is alarmed by reports of missing Final Voter Registration lists in Bombali and Koinadugu districts, as reported by the NEC in an official broadcast. NEW does not believe the measure employed by NEC officials in Ward 43 Diang Chiefdom Koinadugu, whereby a new voter registration list was generated on-the-spot using the ID cards of voters who came to the polling station complies with electoral regulations, even though the process was undertaken in the presence of political party officials. In addition, NEW requests that the NEC provide more information on the case of the missing voter registration lists in Bombali district and clarify what measures were undertaken to overcome their absence.

With regards to **campaigning**, NEW observers reported no pronounced campaigning in or around polling stations. Out of 1132 polling stations reporting, the overwhelming majority of cases (96%) signaled that there was no campaigning within 100 meters of polling stations, as required by the regulations. In the 43 cases where campaigning occurred, in 24 cases there were campaign posters near the polling stations, and in 22 cases there was active campaigning around the polling station.

In terms of actual **voting procedures**, data from 1132 polling stations observed by NEW indicated that in 93.6% of cases the proper voting procedures were followed. However, there were notable issues, including: in 43 cases, officials were not explaining procedures to every voter; in 29 cases, officials failed to respect procedures for persons with disabilities, pregnant women, lactating mothers, and elderly

people; and in 26 cases officials were adjudged to have failed to treat all voters equally (excluding cases of preferential treatment for elderly or disabled voters). Other issues that occurred on a smaller scale included failure to prevent group voting and failure to provide all 4 ballots to voters.

Regarding the **organisation of the voting procedure**, in the same vein, the majority of over 1000 polling stations reporting indicated that the process was carried out in an orderly manner. However, NEW notes that a significant proportion of instances of disorderly process occurred in the Western Area (both urban and rural areas). Indeed NEW received several reports from its observers about overcrowding and voter confusion in and around the Freetown area. Delays in the process, including due to lack of voter material such as ballots, resulted in high tensions among voters waiting in line. As the process moves into the critical counting phase, NEW is perturbed by the increase in reports of high-tension or violent incidents.

Turnout has been very high across the 14 districts, according to data from NEW observers: by 1 p.m. there was a turnout of 65.1% in 1233 polling stations reported.

Despite the above figures being very positive on a nationwide level, NEW remains concerned by a number of incidents reported in various parts of the country. There have been continued severe delays in the voting process, with at least 1 polling station in Kenema district and 1 station in Port Loko district having failed to open by 4 PM. NEW has further received reports about its staff being denied full access to observe the process until intervention from senior management.

Despite the controversy raised by the limitations on the right to movement, NEW commends the security forces, NEC, political parties and civil society on the measure taken to restrict vehicular traffic, which contributed to calming the potential for tension. However, the NEC arrangements for commuting voters was largely ineffective.

NEW appeals to voters to promote a peaceful atmosphere as the polling procedure moves into the critical closing and counting phase.

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