



COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IN SIERRA LEONE

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COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IN SIERRA LEONE (CCSL) INTERIM REPORT ON THE NATIONAL MULTITIER ELECTIONS ON 24 JUNE 2023

1. INTRODUCTION

This interim report is a follow-up to the initial and preliminary statements released on 24th and 28th June respectively. This in fulfillment of Council's promise to come out with a much more detailed report when all the results of the June 24 elections have been released by the Electoral Council of Sierra Leone (ECSL).

This report is based on the analysis of 484 (four hundred and eighty-four) reports/check list received from Council's observers at the various field/polling stations throughout the country. This number represents 80% of the total of 605 (six hundred and five) observers trained and deployed by Council on polling day

The Council is proud to state that it was able to deploy observers to all the 16 (sixteen) electoral districts in the country. This was made possible due to the support received from Council international donor partners – Bread for the World (BftW) (Council's main donor) and Christian Aid.

Accordingly Council was able to cover 4, 686 (40%) of the total of 11,832 (eleven thousand eight hundred and thirty two) polling stations throughout the country. Efforts of Council's local observers were augmented by other local observers and international observers from Liberia.

It must be noted though that Council could have done far more were it not faced with 2(two) major constraints namely

- Logistics much more suited for difficult/inaccessible terrain like in Falaba and Koinadugu districts.
- Inadequate finance.

The check lists made available to observers both manually and electronically sought to find out answers to some salient points considered critical in assessing an election to be free, fair peaceful and transparent.

Council wishes to put on record that although it received other anecdotal reports this analysis is mainly based on what its observers could readily verify.

The 2023 General elections were the 6th (sixth) elections after the Civil war which officially ended in 2002. It was the first election which was in the main financed by the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL).

Members: African Methodist Episcopal, Baptist Convention Sierra Leone, Bo Anglican Diocese, Christ Apostolic Church, Christian Reformed Church, Church of the Lord Aladura, Church of God of Prophecy, Church of God World Missions Sierra Leone, Congregational Evangelical Mission, Countess of Huntingdon Connexion, El-Shaddai Charismatic Ministries, Emmanuel Baptist Conference, Evangelical Lutheran Church, Evangelical Mission, Freetown Anglican Diocese, Methodist Church Sierra Leone, Missionary Church of Africa, National Evangelical Mission, National Pentecostal Mission, United Brethren in Christ, United Methodist Church, Vine Memorial Baptist, Wesleyan Church of Sierra Leone and West African Methodist Church. **Affiliate:** Bible Society Sierra Leone, Christ United Pentecostal, Faith Worship Ministries, Scripture Union, Sierra Leone Theological College & Management and Church Training Center, St. Peters Healing Church, United Church Women, Young Men Christian Association, Young Women's Christian Association.

Council efforts at observing the elections were enabled by past experiences in observing the preceding 5 (five) elections.

This 2023 Multi-tier elections were the third (3rd) to have been done on the someday. As consistently pointed out earlier such arrangements have their own challenges.

This was in no way better than earlier experiences. In fact it is believed much more demanding as the Proportional Representation (PR) District System was introduced for Parliamentary and Local Government Elections.

The questions asked in the checklist covered the following 4 (four) broad areas:

1. Events before the start of polling/voting
2. Events during the polls
3. Events after polling/voting
4. Overall assessment of the polls.

2. FINDINGS:

2.1.1. EVENTS BEFORE THE START OF POLLING/VOTING:

- **Voting materials:** A significant number of our observers 66.6% noted that voting materials were not available in a number of polling stations before 7:00a.m. when polling was scheduled to have started.
Obviously this led to a delay in the opening of polls at the affected stations. In fact some polling stations, it was reported, did not start the voting process until as late as 11:00am
- **Presence of Party Agents** – An area where the various political parties were not able to make their presence felt.
According to observers' reports only the major political parties – the All Peoples Congress (APC) and the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) fielded agents in about 85% of the polling stations/centres.
Even where party agents were fielded some of them were not physically present at the beginning of polls
- **Ballot boxes empty before polls?** One major but familiar accusation usually levied against some electoral officials, in an attempt at rigging the elections, is the stuffing of ballot boxes with thumb printed ballots in favour of one party, before, during or at the close of polls. Hence the need to ensure that the ballot boxes were empty before /start of voting.
It is reassuring to record that all observers responded in the affirmative to the questions of the ballot boxes being empty before polling started.
- **Were the ballot boxes locked and sealed after being shown as empty?** To that question the answers of our observers were totally positive.
There was however some misunderstanding as ballot boxes differ from one another – some have positions for 4 (four) seals, others with only 2 (two)

2.2.DURING POLLING:

- **Did the voting start on time?**
As earlier stated due to the late arrival of voting materials polling in about 70% of the polling stations/centres did not start on time i.e. 7:00am as was scheduled.

- **Maintenance of Order within the polling stations** – For a successful and peaceful polls, the maintenance of law and order before, during and after the polls is very crucial.

It was therefore important to note that about 90% of the observers reported that order was maintained throughout the polling.

A few skirmishes were observed but they were not enough to disrupt the smooth flow of voting in general.

- **Was security adequate?** With the high level of tension experienced before polling day, especially the last days of campaigning, many people were apprehensive/concerned over the adequacy of security on polling day

It is therefore significant to note that 99% of observers reported that there was a huge presence of security at the polling stations and it can be taken to mean security as provided was adequate.

- **Were the ballot boxes within sight?** Transparency is one of the hallmarks of a free and fair elections process. Hence the reason for giving premium to the above stated question.

It is therefore re-assuring to record that 98.8% of our observers noted that the ballot boxes were in sight of all during polling.

- **Interference with the voting process** – Of concern to voters is the level, if any, of interference with the voting process.

On polling day, observers noted there was no significant interference with the voting process.

- **Secrecy of Voting** – Provisions are normally made to ensure that voter's preferences are held in secrecy. Thus polling booths out of the view of others were provided to ensure such secrecy.

Unfortunately the make shift system employed at polling stations which were grouped together proved inadequate. That negatively affected the degree of secrecy present at this year's polls.

- **Were women deterred from voting?** On the whole pre elections campaign/sensitization yielded positive result in that a large number of female voters turned out to vote and did so without hindrance and / or intimidation.

- **Was counting conducted in the presence of party agent?** The observers reported that the counting of votes was done in the presence of party agents and observers. On the whole it can be concluded that the counting at the different polling stations was indeed transparent.

Interested members of the public were standing not far from the scene of counting and so in full view of the process.

2.3.OVERALL ASSESSMENT /IMPRESSION OF THE POLLS:

Asked if from the evidences of their observation they could ascertain if the polling was free and fair, the observes responded in the affirmative.

It was also noted that the environment in which voting was done was relatively peaceful. Sierra Leoneans patiently waited for the polls to open even when there was the delay as mentioned earlier.

Conduct of election officials – Even though a large percentage of those officials was not officially identified yet observers commended them for a satisfactory work done.

Unfortunately a few of those officials did not comport themselves up to expectations and behaved unprofessionally.

Also on the whole it was noted that their attitude to party agents and observers was, in the main, cordial and cooperative

3. TALLYING/TABULATION OF VOTES:

The tallying of votes was done at the regional offices/centers. There were tallying centers established in Freetown (Wellington) – Western Region, Kenema – Eastern Region, Makeni-Northern Region, Port Loko – North Western Region and Bo – Southern Region.

The Results Reconciliation Forms (RRFs) were sent from all the polling stations through the District Electoral Offices in Tamper Evident Envelopes (TEEs) to the respective tallying centers. The result sheets were checked and they were entered into a computer system applying a two tier blind entry system.

In case of discrepancies between the two (2) independent blind entries of data, the system/quarantined the results for further investigation. In such a case the ballot box was to have been opened and the correct result established by a recount of the ballots. Unfortunately that procedure was not apparently followed and that led to scenes of violence at the tallying centers.

The tallying of results was to have been carried out at district office level in the presence of accredited stakeholders-party agents, local and international observers. Unfortunately because of security reasons those people were kept at a distance thus impairing their full view of the process

The Stakeholders stayed at the centers but it was obvious they were unable to undertake any meaningful observation. Thus the tallying process was negatively affected as the required transparency was absent.

Again it is claimed that tallying was not completed when the Chairman of ECSL, the National Returning Officer announced a provisional result of 60% of “*votes cast*” or of “*the polling stations*”. Till date no one is certain which of the two informed the results as announced on Tuesday 27th June. This, no doubt, caused a lot of fracas notably in Port Loko spreading on to Masiaka.

It must also be noted that failure of the ECSL officials to answer questions regarding procedures at the tallying centers especially with regard results forms which were flagged for review and why results were published when tallying was not complete merely heightened the lack of transparency of the process.

4. OVERALL CONCLUSION

There were a few problems which were considered to have had some negative effects on the Elections, such as:

- (i) Access to some of the polling stations was a huge challenge and also overcrowding at polling centers with more people but less polling stations

- (ii) Mismatch of voters with voter ID cards whose details were missing from the Final Voters Register (FVR) but found in the party agents' lists. There were also voters with the necessary particulars who were not allowed to vote simply because their names were not found in the FVR.

Notwithstanding those problems and weaknesses as mentioned in the report, it could be concluded that the 2023 June 24 Elections were relatively free, fair and generally peaceful.

Unfortunately that relative peace and calm has been seriously negated by post polling activities resulting in the challenge to the results as pronounced by the National Returning Officer.

The country is at present in an unhealthy state of impasse. The Council call for **truth and justice** not merely **peace for complacency**. Council urges for an immediate face to face meeting with the Election Management Bodies (EMBs) and Election Observers to resolve all outstanding issues related to the Elections.

The voters turn-out of average 87% was impressive. The patience exercised by voters whilst awaiting the opening of polls together with such an impressive voters turn-out were a clear demonstration of the fact that the right to vote is not being taken for granted. It further affirms that democracy is widely appreciated in the country.

Council still holds that the number of invalid votes (about 4.7%) was high and does not meet with international standards. **More needs to be done in terms of voter/Electoral Education/Sensitization.**

The high expectations that this sixth post-civil war elections (aided by recommendations of local and international observers of the 2018 Elections) would have proved a milestone in the process of democratic consolidation in Sierra Leone and a clear endorsement of a maturing attitude of the people of the country now hang in the balance!

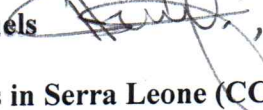
Council holds firmly that if the overcast clouds on the results are cleared then it can be concluded that the Multitier elections of 2023 would have met international standards of free, fair and peaceful elections.

Accordingly the Council of Churches in Sierra Leone (CCSL) takes this opportunity to congratulate the people of Sierra Leone for voting in a relatively peaceful environment. It is our prayer that this spirit of fostering a peaceful and just environment will persist!

May just peace reign supreme in our beloved country:

*For the Lord our God is gracious and merciful
and will not turn away his face from us "2 Chronicles 30: 9"*

A final and more comprehensive and detailed report containing recommendations for better future elections will be published by Council by mid-September 2023.

Rev. Henry A. Samuels 
President
Council of Churches in Sierra Leone (CCSL)

Freetown
Tuesday 25th July 2023