Press Statement for Immediate Release

Freetown, 19th April 2021: NEC Conducts Peaceful Bye-election in Ward 405 with High level Police Presence

National Electoral Commission (NEC) conducted peaceful bye-election in Ward 405, Constituency 115, Western Area Urban District on Saturday 17th April 2021. The vacancy occurred following the death of the substantive councillor, Mohamed Jean Thorley, of the All People’s Congress (APC).

NEW observed the heavy presence of police in polling centres and electoral Ward and were professional in their conduct. NEW also noted the conspicuous absence of political party heavyweights on polling day, which was a major source of conflict and violence in previous elections.

NEW observed the entire process including opening, polling, closing and counting, tallying and the announcement of provisional results. NEW recruited, trained and deployed observers in all the 41 polling stations. NEW also deployed 4 supervisors and 2 roving teams.

Findings

- Polling stations were opened on time, except for polling station 7 at Olivet Baptist School, Peacock Farm Centre Code 16036, which was relocated.
- NEC staff were mainly youth with more females this time around.
- Hand washing facilities were available in all polling centres.
- Voters complied with COVID-19 rules of hand washing, except for some voters.
- NEC enforced the wearing of facemasks in all polling stations.
- Thermometers were available and used in all polling centres.
- The 2 political parties (APC&SLPP) that contested the election deployed party agents in all polling stations.
- Voter turn-out was fairly encouraging at 39.4%.
- Police presence was highly visible in all polling centres.
- Other observers/stakeholders were: Election Conflict Prevention and Mediation Group (ECPMG) and Office of National Security (ONS).
- Senior NEC officials were also on the ground to support the process.

Incidents
• At Centre Code 16036 Olivet Baptist School, Peacock Farm, polling station 7 was relocated after political party agents and NEC officials reached a consensus due to the fact that the initial location of the station did not protect the secrecy of the ballots. Though they did not find an ideal location, but both party agents and NEC officials agreed to move the station to the only option available.

• At Centre Code 16037, Ninka Pre/Primary School, Upper Taylor Street, Koya Town, up till about 8:30am, the polling staff were seeing using battery-lamps to read through the voter register as a result of poor lightening system in the polling station.

• At Centre Code 16037, Ninka Pre/Primary School, Upper Taylor Street, Koya Town, polling station 3, a lady who came to vote met somebody had already mistakenly thumb printed against her name on the voter register. The polling officer asked her to go home and come back at 4:30pm upon which the matter will be looked into and resolved. She went out briefly and came back insisting on her right to vote and that she must be allowed to vote. This led to a standoff that was later resolved and the woman allowed to vote. Similar incidents also occurred in station 1 of the same centre and at Calvary Lutheran Community Primary School, Musa Street, Up Mountain, in polling station 3.

• At centre Code 16035, Open Space, Back of Besto Foam Company, Opposite Brewery, the SLPP party agent in station 10 was interfering with the process in station 9 which resulted to arguments, but the NEC staff intervened and resolved the ensuing conflict. He advised the SLPP party agent to concentrate in his assigned polling station.

Recommendations
NEW recommends that;
• NEC to ensure polling stations are suitably located in terms of maintaining secrecy of the ballots and lightening system.
• Political parties to train their party agents in what they should and should not do while serving as party agents on polling day.
• The Sierra Leone Police (SLP) to maintain the level of professionalism displayed at the just concluded election in subsequent elections.

National Election Watch (NEW) is a coalition of local and international organizations in Sierra Leone with a common objective of supporting free, fair and peaceful elections.

This Electoral Observation was realized with the financial support of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of National Election Watch – Sierra Leone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

XXX End XXX

Contacts: Marcella Samba-Sesay +23276984590, James Lahai +23276962233, Sallieu Kamara +23276613324

Banker: Sierra Leone Commercial Bank (SLCB)