PRESS RELEASE

The European Union and the National Election Watch renew their partnership in support to democratization in Sierra Leone

Freetown, 2 June 2020: The Vice-President Dr. Mohamed Juldeh Jalloh, the Ambassador of the European Union to Sierra Leone, Tom Vens, and the Chairperson of the National Election Watch (NEW) Marcella Samba Sesay, launched a new two-year partnership programme between the EU and NEW to promote governance reforms and democratization in Sierra Leone. The Acting Chief Electoral Commissioner of the National Electoral Commission (NEC), Mr. Edmond Alpha attended the event.

The launch follows a recent call made by H.E Dr. Julius Maada Bio, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, to civil society organizations and development partners to support government’s efforts to strengthen democratization and good governance in Sierra Leone. The presence of the Guest of Honour, the Honorable Vice-President, who was appointed by H.E. the President to work closely with civil society in that regard, underscores the timeliness and value of this new EU programme. Echoing President Bio's statement to CSOs last week, Vice-President Jalloh said: “Building a viable framework to facilitate CSO and government engagement is vital to institutionalizing democratic processes and good governance. Sustained engagement with CSO constitutes one of the many paths government intends to promote accountability and inclusiveness. We believe civil society should be involved in setting the agenda, planning, implementing, monitoring, reviewing and giving feedback. An extra pair of eyes keeps everyone safer.”

The EU-funded action, valued close to 800,000 EUR (8 billion SLL) seeks to enhance domestic electoral observer organisations’ and citizens’ participation in democratic governance reforms leading to the 2022 and 2023 electoral cycle.

The action will contribute to nation-wide domestic observation of all elections related activities including bye-elections and national civil registration and voter registration operations. It will actively monitor and advocate for the implementation of the recommendations issued by the 2018 electoral observer missions in order to ensure that upcoming local and national elections are credible and transparent and adhere to the highest international standards.

Importantly, the action will also support the design and implementation of civic and electoral education programs throughout the country. “At a time when citizens are disengaging from governance, we felt it essential to rekindle efforts towards expanding the scope of citizens’ participation and knowledge on multi-party democracy, elections and other political processes”, Marcella Sesay Samba explained. “As we advocate for national governance reforms, we will also review NEW’s internal governance systems. This is to further increase efficiency, accountability, transparency, professionalism and integrity, to ensure that “civil society continue to play a viable role in governance.”

Finally, NEW will engage in COVID-19 monitoring and awareness raising to support the Government’s efforts in containing the virus. NEW will utilize its observation expertise to monitor activities along border crossing points, quarantine and holding centres and treatment facilities and inform government and the public on its findings for improvement where required. “His Excellency the President said an extra pair of eyes will keep everyone
safer and has called on CSOS to close the feedback loop”, Marcella Sesay Samba said - “NEW is committed to advocate, monitor, review and give feedback. In doing so, we will pursue a partnership built on mutual trust and cooperation, a relationship that is not one of mistrust and suspicion but one based on shared aspirations, to ensure that the right things are done at the right time, for the right reasons and with the right impact on Sierra Leoneans and the development of our country”.

To achieve the intended results, NEW will collaborate with the Government, with line Ministries and Agencies and with critical stakeholders including: the National Electoral Commission (NEC), the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC), the security apparatus, political parties, democratic and human rights institutions such as the National Commission for Democracy (NCD) and the Human Rights Commission Sierra Leone (HRSL), the Parliament, the Office of the Attorney General and Minister of Justice, the Law Reform Commission, the National Civil Registration Authority (NCRA) and the wider civil society.

The EU has been a long-term supporter of democratic governance reforms in Sierra Leone and actively contributed to the management and observation of electoral operations, as well as multi-party dialogues and national cohesions initiatives. As part of these efforts, the EU has been supporting National Election Watch since 2016, enabling the platform to grow into one of the most reputable domestic observer groups in the region.

Speaking at the launch ceremony, EU Ambassador Tom VENS praised the Government of Sierra Leone’s commitment to strengthen good governance, rule of law, accountability and the partnership with civil society. “The EU reaffirms its strong commitment to strengthening democracy and good governance in Sierra Leone. This requires a vibrant civil society, who should actively promote inclusiveness and help build credible and accountable institutions. We are proud to extend our partnership with NEW, an outstanding platform of over 400 civil society organizations. The European Union and NEW stand together with the Government in support of national cohesion, inclusiveness and democracy for all Sierra Leoneans as the nation fights COVID-19”.

For more information:

About NEW:

National Election Watch (NEW) is a coalition of over 400 civil society organizations that began operations surrounding the 1997 Sierra Leonean Presidential elections. Since then, NEW has established itself as a permanent group with a common desire to support Sierra Leone’s young democracy. NEW has established a decentralized structure across the country and operates through this system. NEW committed to play a vital role to ensure the National Elections and Local Council Elections were free and fair. Since 2005 NEW developed a three-fold strategy to enhance citizens’ participation and ensure a transparent electioneering process, which include: i) Observing not only polling day but the entire electoral process, ii) Deploying an Observer in every polling station and iii) Preparing a situational report with appropriate recommendations.

Thanks to EU funding in 2016, NEW changed its strategy from being reactive to being proactive in its approach to elections observation and involvement in governance issues. Moving from only observing and reporting events when they happen, to sitting at the table where planning and decisions were taken.

NEW was recognized as a critical stakeholder in the 2018 Electoral Cycle and had a presence in a total of 7 Committees: the Census Technical Committee, the National Civil and Voter Registration Taskforce, the Boundary Delimitation Monitoring Committees at both national and district levels, the Elections Basket Fund Steering Committee, the Political Parties Liaison Committee (PPLC), the Integrated Elections Security Planning Committee (IESPC) and the Support to the National Electoral Commission Technical Committee (SNEC). As a result of NEW’s in-depth involvement in the 2018 electoral cycle process, it became a reference for all
international Observer Missions deployed to Sierra Leone in 2018, providing briefings on the electoral environment and preparedness, the security status and conflict flashpoints and even providing valuable information on terrain and aiding with the logistical arrangements of their operations. Other Bodies such as the International Security Advisory Team (ISAT) invited NEW to observe their different layers of trainings for Commanders on how to police electoral activities.

About the European Union global commitment to peace and democracy

From the outset, the European Union (EU) has been an integration project aimed at preserving the peace among its Member States – a fundamental objective that it has succeeded in achieving for over 60 years. As a community of like-minded States, the EU also stands for the fundamental values of democracy and rule of law, which the EU promotes both internally and externally. In line with this vision, the EU aims to integrate the pursuit of peace and democracy in all its external actions in areas such as trade, development, common foreign and security policy, political and diplomatic relations with third countries and multilateral institutions. Strengthening peace and democracy globally has never been an easy task, and today's geopolitical context poses further new challenges. The proliferation and increasing gravity and duration of conflicts, the emergence of new threats, such as terrorism or nuclear proliferation have driven the EU to widen and intensify its efforts. They have also led to a new vision for action revolving around the concept of 'resilient societies' based on the mutually reinforcing pillars of peace and democracy, and a special emphasis on fragile states.

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