Press Statement for Immediate Release

Freetown Monday 7th December 2020: NEC Conducts Peaceful Village Head Bye-Elections in the Western Area Rural District.

National Electoral Commission (NEC) conducted a peaceful Village Head Bye-elections in Mama Beach and Bonga Wharf in Ward 388, Constituency 110 and Ngarahun in Ward 379, Constituency 107 on Saturday 5th December 2020. These elections were conducted to fill vacancies created due to the deaths of the Village Heads in the aforementioned Villages. Senior officials of NEC including the Chief Electoral Commissioner (CEC) were seen moving round polling stations.

National Election Watch (NEW) observed the entire election process by deploying an observer in each of the nine stations in the three villages. NEW also deployed supervisors and roving teams who served as incident reporters and helped observers to text information to the data base in the situation room. NEW observed the Village Head bye-elections in line with its mandate to observe the extent to which standards of holding democratic elections as espoused in the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone, Local Government Act 2004 and Statutory Instrument No.16 of 2005, were adhered to.

Other institutions that observed the Village Head bye-Elections were; Office of National Security (ONS), Inter Religious Council of Sierra Leone, Campaign Against Human Rights and Development International (CHRDI) and the media. The Sierra Leone Police (SLP) was visible in all the Polling Stations.

Key Observations
NEW observed that:
All Polling Stations opened on time with NEC officials and agents of all the candidates present in each of the polling stations.
All voting materials were available in all Polling Stations at the time of opening of polls.
Voting was orderly and peaceful.
Handwashing materials were available in all polling stations and handwashing of voters was enforced.
Wearing of face masks by voters and security officers within the precincts of polling stations was enforced.
Social Distancing was not satisfactorily enforced
Thermometers to check temperatures of voters were available in four polling stations.
Police officers and other security personnel (armed and unarmed) were deployed in all polling stations.
Police officers deployed to man polling stations were paid their allowances/stipends on the spot. Additionally, those police officers that were deployed on the eve of the elections in all the polling stations were provided with breakfast on polling day. NEW commends the leadership of the Sierra Leone Police for taking this action, which could increase police officers’ morale and commitment to duty.
The voter turn-out was encouraging.

Recommendations
NEW Recommends that:
• NEC improves on the compliance of social distancing of voters in the upcoming elections in line with its COVID-19 Elections Policy.
• The Sierra Leone Police and other security agencies should continue to enforce the electoral laws, policies and regulations.

Banker: Sierra Leone Commercial Bank (SLCB)
• Unaccredited persons should not be allowed within 400 meters of the polling precincts in the upcoming bye-elections.
• The Sierra Leone Police leadership to continue the best practice to pay stipends/allowances/incentives/ration to police officers deployed in the upcoming rerun and bye-elections on the spot.
• NEC to expedite the accreditation process to ensure all deserving persons are accredited in time.

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. NEW will continue to observe all elections related activities and will report its findings accordingly.

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