
National Election Watch (NEW) applauds NEC and all stakeholders for the peaceful conduct and conclusion of polls in Ward 242, Kaffu Bullom Chiefdom, Port Loko District on Saturday, 28th September 2019.

NEW observed the Bye-election in Ward 242 in line with its mandate to assess the extent to which standards of holding democratic elections as espoused in the 1991 Constitution, the Public Elections Act (PEA) of 2012 and other regional and international principles are adhered to.

NEW deployed stationed observers in all the 11 Polling Centres. Additionally, NEW deployed 2 roving supervisors and an oversight team from the Secretariat to support the stationed observers and to respond promptly to incidents. NEW observed the entire process, including opening, polling, closing and counting, tallying and the announcement of results. The tallying and announcement of results were done at the Masoila Community Centre.

Key Observations

NEW observed that:

- Polling stations were opened on time across Ward 242 with five NEC officials in each of the polling stations.
- NEC polling staff were mainly youth and gender balanced.
- Essential voting materials such as: ballot boxes, ballot papers, seals, voting booths, voter register, NEC stamps, indelible ink and Result Reconciliation Forms (RRFs) were available in all polling stations.
- Political Party agents from all the six contesting parties were present in all the polling stations.
- Security personnel from the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) and mostly OSD were deployed and visible in all the Polling Centres.
- Other observers were present. These are: the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC), Office of National Security (ONS) and the media.
- Voter turn-out was highly encouraging at 61.3%.
- At UBA Secondary School Lungi centre code 10073, the Deputy Commissioner of National Youth Commission (NAYCOM), intercepted and removed the NEC queue controller who was not visibly attired as a NEC official. The Deputy Youth Commissioner further moved the queue controller from his post and took him to the Polling Centre Manager (PCM) for identification. In the interim, the queue was disrupted and voters rushed into the polling stations uncontrolled. The PCM later verified the queue controller as a NEC staff.
- Polling centre code 10079, open space Nbaimbaya was set up within the confines of the Paramount Chief’s compound.
- At Open Space Kaifala Street, centre code 10078, ballot boxes and other materials were moved to another location as a result of the heavy down pour of rain.
- In polling centre code 10079, open space Nbaimbaya, station 1, the Presiding Officer (PO) at the close of the polls did not reconcile the ballots and proceeded with sorting and counting.
Concern
NEW is concerned that despite repeated calls, government and other political party officials are not only seen at polling stations and precincts, but are also interfering with the electoral process.

Recommendations
NEW Recommends that:

- The SLP and other security agencies to be resolute in enforcing electoral laws, policies and regulations; unaccredited persons should not be allowed within 400 meters of the polling precinct.
- During the rains, NEC should consider relocating centers from open spaces to proper and conducive locations within the same proximity.
- For the sake of free, fair and credible elections NEC should desist from using primary stakeholders’ premises as polling centers.
- NEC personnel should be consistent with the procedures in delivering transparent and credible elections as reconciliation is a critical stage in the process.

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 and will report its findings accordingly.

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