PRESS STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Freetown Sierra Leone, 18th June, 2018: NEC Completes the 7th March 2018 Local Council Elections on 16th June 2018 but With Low Voter Turnout in all Three Districts.

National Electoral Commission (NEC) on June 16th 2018 conducted elections for 5 multi-member wards in Port Loko and Makeni city councils and Bonthe Municipality where under nomination of candidates was done for the March 7th 2018 Local Council Elections. National Election Watch (NEW) observed the elections in Port Loko Wards 234 and 235, Makeni wards 121 and 123 and Bonthe Municipality ward 308 deploying two hundred and thirty-seven stationed observers, one in each polling station across the 5 wards with support teams from the regions and the National Secretariat. Voter turn-out in all the wards was low indicating voter apathy but also due to low voter education. For instance, in Port Loko, voters were asking, ‘What type of election is NEC conducting since we are just coming out of the general elections few months back?’

NEW observed that 78% of the polling stations were opened on time i.e. polling stations that opened between 7:00am – 7:30 am and 22% of polling stations opened after 7:30am with the NEC staff present in all the polling stations. Observers’ indicated that 56% of the polling stations had party agents (APC, NGC, SLPP) at the setup and opening of polling stations and 93% reported that there were at least 2 party agents during the counting of results.

NEW observed that 95% of the polling stations had security presence and there were Sierra Leone Police Patrol teams in the communities where voting was taking place in the three districts. Office of National Security District Officers and team were also patrolling polling centers observing the process

Observers reported that polling station locations in all 3 districts were suitable and disability friendly.

Whilst Makeni and Bonthe did not report campaigning around polling stations, 6% of data from Port Loko reported that there was some form of campaigning in or within 300 meters of polling station. Also, in Port Loko district unlike the other districts the resident minister (North-West Region) and the deputy minister of primary and secondary education were seen entering polling centers.

NEW observers reported that the counting process was open and observed by all the political party agents (APC, NGC and SLPP) present and they signed the RRFs after counting.

NEW will continue to observe all the Elections and Electoral processes in Sierra Leone and report their findings to various stakeholders and to the People of Sierra Leone.
NEW is a civil society coalition comprising local and international NGOs, Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and local associations with a common objective of supporting free and fair elections. A credible election process must be transparent and free from fear. NEW has been operational since 2002 and observed many international and local Electoral processes.

NEW is part of the Standing Together for Democracy Consortium supported by UKAID. Further support is also received from the European Union Delegation in Sierra Leone and the Open Society Initiative of West Africa (OSIWA) to enhance technology in Elections Observation.

Contacts: Marcella Samba-Sesay +23276984590, James Lahai +23276962233, Ngolo Katta +23276606419