NEW DISTURBED BY VIOLENCE IN CONSTITUENCY 043 BYE-ELECTION

National Election Watch (NEW) is disturbed by the violence which characterized the Parliamentary Bye-election held in Constituency 043 in Koinadugu District on Saturday 21st September, 2019. NEW calls on all Election Management Bodies (EMBs) to put necessary measures in place to address incidences of violence in future elections. The National Electoral Commission (NEC) conducted Parliamentary Bye-election in Constituency 043 in Koinadugu and two Headman elections in Waterloo and Cole Town in the Western Area Rural District on Saturday 21st September, 2019. Whilst the Headman elections in Waterloo and Cole Town were conducted in a relatively calm and peaceful atmosphere, the Parliamentary Bye-election in Constituency 043 was characterized by violence. NEW, however, notes that despite the incidences of violence, polling went undisrupted.

NEW deployed stationed observers in all polling centres in constituency 043 and Village Head Elections (VHE) in Waterloo and Cole Town. 5 roving supervisors to support the stationed observers and to respond promptly to incidences were also deployed. Additionally, NEW deployed 3 oversight support teams comprising members of the Strategic Management Committee (SMC) and Secretariat staff. NEW observed the entire process, including opening, polling, closing and counting, tallying, and the announcement of results, which was done at NEC District Office in the Western Area Rural District on Saturday 21st September, 2019 and in Kabala Community Centre on Sunday, 22nd September, 2019.

Observations
NEW observed that:

- Polling stations were opened on time in the 3 locations.
- NEC polling staff was mainly youth with gender considerations.
- NEC provided Tactile ballots for visually impaired voters.
- Political Party agents in Constituency 043 and candidate agents in the VHE were present in all the polling stations.
- Security personnel were deployed and visible in all the Polling Centres.
- Other observers were the Office of National Security (ONS), British High Commission (BHC) and the media.
- Voter turn-out for constituency 043 was satisfactory (52.46%), while the VHE was very low with 21% in Waterloo and 13.8% in Cole Town.
- In Constituency 043, a sitting Member of Parliament, Hon. Foday Lamin Kabba of Constituency 044 of the main opposition APC Party was reportedly abducted on his way to Kamayortorto to deploy his party agents, but he emerged at Bafodia later in the day.
- Between Kamadaindaina and Bafodia, 4 men who claimed they were timber operators were beaten and two of them wounded by unidentified people. The police found in their possession: spade, axe, hammer and cutlass. They were issued with medical report by the Bafodia Police Division.
- In Polling Centre Code 6020 WCSL Primary School Kakoya, a group of young people who could not be identified as residents of Kakoya were roaming around the vicinity of the centre.
A similar group of young people were also seen at Polling Centre Code 6021, WCSL Primary School, Sakuta throughout the polling day.

A vehicle with licensed no. plate AOW 362 with a group of young people onboard was moving from centre to centre especially between Kakoya and Sakuta with no accreditation from NEC.

Towards the close of the polls indigenes of Kakoya gathered around few meters from the Polling Centre Code 6020 claiming they were protecting their community as they have observed many unfamiliar faces in their community.

NEC used the national voter register for the VHE in Western Area Rural District (WARD) rather than individual village voter register. This caused chaos when people came from Benguema Village and other villages to vote in the Waterloo VHE.

At Nelson Mandela Secondary School Centre Code, 15004 at York Road in Waterloo a youth was apprehended with a fake voter ID Card and handed over to the police.

Towards the close of the polls at Hartshorn Street, Frandie Hall, Centre Code 15037 a black Mercedes Benz Car with licensed no. AOB 961 with youth onboard drove with excessive speed which had the propensity to endanger lives and disrupt the counting process.

This same black Mercedes Benz Car with registration no. AOB 961 was earlier seen driven by a man who was distributing food to candidate agents.

Recommendations:

- ONS and PPRC should enforce all MoUs and other agreements they signed with political parties to ensure peaceful conduct of elections.
- Political parties should desist from importing youth to areas where elections are being held to cause violence and confusion.
- SLP should ensure that all cases of election related-violence reported to them are speedily investigated and prosecuted regardless of who is involved.
- SLP should restrict the movement of people in and around election areas prior to polling day to prevent miscreants from infiltrating these areas.
- NEC should consider developing individual Village voter register in the WARD for future VHE.

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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