Bye-Elections in Kono and Kambia Districts end peacefully but with low voter turnout and few incidents

National Election Watch (NEW) observed the bye-elections conducted in Ward 099, Constituency 030 in Kono district and Ward 204, Constituency 062 in Kambia district by the National Electoral Commission (NEC) on Saturday, 22nd June 2019. Both elections ended peacefully, but they were characterized by a very low voter turn-out and a few incidents that require urgent attention by the appropriate Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) to prevent a repeat in future elections.

NEW deployed 29 stationed observers, two supervisors and two roving teams comprising of senior members of NEW to provide oversight support to both districts. NEW observed the electoral process from the opening of the polls in the morning, right through the night to the tallying and announcement of the certified results in the early morning hours of the following day.

NEW commends NEC for the successful conduct of the two bye-elections and the security sector for ensuring that the environment was peaceful.

Observations
- Polling stations were opened on time across the two wards where the bye-elections were conducted.
- Voter turn-out was very low with only 36.28 percent in Ward 099 in Kono district and 39.9% in ward 204 in Kambia district.
- Political party agents were present in all the polling stations.
- Armed OSD and SLP personnel were visible in all the polling centres across the two wards.
- Vehicular restriction was effectively enforced with only accredited vehicles by NEC allowed to move around.
- PPRC, Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone and other citizens groups observed the elections in both districts.
- Three voters in Kono were caught trying to use fake voter ID cards to cast their vote in Polling Centre 3220 at Assembly of God Primary School in Koidu town, Polling Centre 03212 at Open Space in Community Market in Koeyor and at polling centre 03221 Islamic Primary School Kono Spark in Koidu and were handed over to the police.
- Election results from six polling stations at Polling Centre 3210 in KDEC Primary School, Koeyor in Kono district were nullified after the Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP) submitted a protest letter to NEC at the end of the tallying process stating that “two of their party agents were arrested and taken away from the centre to the police station for over one hour and then later brought back after

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malpractices had already taken place’. There were six polling stations in this centre and this incident happened only in polling station 4. NEW condemns the action of the police and the nullification of the results in the other five polling stations that were not affected. This action is unfair and it disenfranchised the electorate who cast their votes in those polling stations. This is a fundamental human right abuse on democracy and elections.

- The Tally Cetre in ward 204 in Mambolo chiefdom was located in Kychom by NEC, which is sited in a different chiefdom from where the election was held and which has a very difficult terrain to traverse and challenging sea routes. This made it difficult for people who would otherwise observe the tallying process not being able to do so.

**NEW Recommendations that:**

- The SLP speeds up the investigation relating to the use of the fake Voter ID cards.

- Tally centres be established where they are easily accessible.

*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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