NEW Worried Over Election Violence Exhibited in the Bye-Election in Ward 210

NEW is worried about the violence and influx of youth and political party stalwarts in Ward 210, Kambia District, during the Bye-election conducted on Saturday, 23rd November 2019, by the National Electoral Commission (NEC). The vacancy occurred as a result of the death of the substantive Councillor.

National Election Watch (NEW) observed the Bye-election 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 7 stationed observers in Ward 210 with 3 roving supervisors 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 Kambia District Council Hall on Sunday, 24th November 2019.

Key Observations
NEW observed that:

- **Polling stations were opened on time across the ward.**
- **NEC deployed an inclusive polling staff (youth, women and Persons with Disability)**
- **Essential voting materials such as: ballot boxes, ballot papers, seals, voting booths, voter register, NEC stamps, indelible ink, papers and Result Reconciliation Forms (RRFs) were available in all polling stations.**
- **3 (APC, NGC and SLPP) out of the 6 contesting Political Parties deployed party agents in all polling stations.**
- **Security personnel from the Sierra Leone Police (SLP), mostly OSD were deployed and visible in all polling centres.**
- **Other observers present were: Office of National Security (ONS) and the media.**
- **Voter turn-out was good with 53.2%.**
- **There were rowdy crowds of people hanging around polling centres after casting their votes.**
- **There was a visible presence of senior government officials, ministers and political party stalwarts in the ward.**
- **A well-known thug in Bami Lumar called Electric was seen moving around with youth in an unlicensed black Toyota Hilux.**
- **There were 2 roving vehicles with covered number plates carrying groups of youth across the ward.**
- **The youth in the 2 roving vehicles attacked the leader of the NGC political party, Hon. Dr. Kandeh K. Yumkella, and team in front of the ABC Business Centre at Royema section close to KDEC Primary School Polling Centre code 08161 in Kasirie. The youth forcefully tried to take his mobile phone or get him to delete some photos he had taken. In the process, Hon. Dr. Kandeh K. Yumkella and others sustained injuries.**

Concerns
NEW is concerned that:

- The presence of senior government officials, ministers and political party stalwarts in elections heightens tension and serves as a recipe for violence; they were still seen in Ward 210 Bye-election.
- Despite repeated calls, vehicles with covered and unlicensed number plates were spotted within polling precincts carrying youth in the full view of security personnel.
- Bye-elections are now characterized by violence with youth being misused.

**Recommendations**

NEW Recommends that:

- The importation of youth into areas where elections are being held be banned and defaulters prosecuted.
- SLP ensures that there are no crowds of people in the precincts of polling centres after casting their votes.
- ONS, SLP and other security agencies arrest and prosecute vehicles with covered and unlicensed number plates plying within areas where elections are being conducted.
- ONS and SLP put strict measures in place to prohibit the movement of senior government officials, ministers and political party stalwarts with groups of youth during elections.

**Conclusion**

NEW commends NEC for the successful conduct and conclusion of the Bye-election in Ward 210. NEW further commends SLP for their prompt intervention in calling for OSD reinforcement to man the polling centres during counting.

*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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