NEC Conducts Bye-elections in Falaba and Koinadugu Districts

National Electoral Commission (NEC) Conducted Local Council Bye-Elections in Ward 146, Koinadugu District and for the District Chairperson in Falaba District on Saturday, October 26, 2019. The vacancies occurred as a result of the deaths of both the Councillor of Ward 146 and the Chairperson of the Falaba District Council.

National Election Watch (NEW) observed both Bye-elections 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.

With support from the Mercury International, NEW deployed 133 stationed observers in both Districts. Additionally, NEW deployed 14 roving supervisors and an oversight team comprising Strategic Management Committee (SMC) and Secretariat staff 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 Kabala Community Centre on Sunday, October 27, 2019.

Key Observations
NEW observed that:

- Polling stations were opened on time across Ward 146 and Falaba District, 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, tactile ballot papers and Result Reconciliation Forms (RRFs) were available in all polling stations.
- Contesting Political Party agents were present in all polling stations.
- Security personnel from the Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF), Sierra Leone Police (SLP), mostly OSD, were deployed and visible in both districts.
- Other observers present were: Office of National Security (ONS) and the media.
- Voter turn-out in Ward 146 was good with 67.61% whereas in Falaba District it was not so good with 41.1%.
- In Ward 146, there was rising tension at about 10:00 a.m. between supporters of APC and SLPP within the precinct of polling center 6029, R.C. Primary School, Koinadugu Village. A combined team of SLP and RSLAF escorted the feuding parties out of the ward.
- At Bamikoro Village, one of NEW’s Supervisors’ mobile phone was snatched by a driver carrying SLPP supporters with registration no. APL 300, on the suspicion that the NEW Supervisor was videoing them. The vehicle was one of the three vehicles being escorted by the security forces from polling centre 6029 out of the ward. The driver deleted some materials from the phone and threw it into the bush. The Supervisor was further insulted and threatened by the occupants of the two vehicles. However, the phone was later retrieved by a police officer and returned to the Supervisor.
At Bamikoro Village also, 2 grey jeeps were spotted with covered number plates carrying some youth.

Concerns
NEW is concerned that:
- The safety and security of our observers is under threat.
- Despite repeated calls, vehicles with covered number plates are spotted within polling precincts carrying youth.
- Bye-elections are now characterized by violence with youth being misused.

Recommendations
NEW Recommends that:
- ONS, SLP and other security agencies to arrest and prosecute vehicles with covered number plates plying within areas where elections are being conducted.
- Political parties and their supporters should respect the mandate of NEW as a recognized domestic election observer group in Sierra Leone.

Conclusion
NEW commends NEC for the successful conduct and conclusion of both Bye-elections. NEW further commends both SLP and RSLAF for their prompt intervention in dispersing both political party supporters who were creating tension in Koinadugu Village.

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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