



15<sup>th</sup> March 2018

## PRESS STATEMENT

The Native Consortium and Research Centre/Native Think Tank hereby congratulate all Sierra Leoneans for a peaceful conduct of our General elections and thank God for making it possible for us as a nation. As an accredited election observer for the 2018 elections, however, we also want to use this opportunity to highlight some key issues we identified during the whole process, beginning with the registration exercise to the announcement of the first round of elections.

The Native Consortium & Research Centre (NCRC) has been Monitoring the election process from the registration process, through to the voting day on March 7 and all subsequent developments leading to the announcement of the final results on the 13 March, 2018. Before the Registration, the NCRC had been monitoring through our elections machinery in which all data and information on the elections processes was filtered, analysed and verified. We also interfaced with other Civil Society Organisations, International observers, and other National Election Commission (NEC) accredited Monitors that were deployed across the country.

On the whole, we deem the election process as free and fair, notwithstanding a few challenges, which we would like to bring to the attention of NEC and the public with an aim of lending credence to our democratic progress as a nation.

In line with this, the NCRC submits the following observations and recommendations:

### 1. OBSERVATIONS

- a) The National Returning Officer in his first 25% result gave us a single decimal digit result, the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> were on double digit decimal, but the final 100% result was in a single decimal percentage, which led to a wrong total of 100.3%. The one decimal result gave an inaccurate percentage (%) compared to the 50% and 75% results, which gave an accurate ranking because of the rounding up effect.
- b) The light system in all the polling stations during the counting at night was very poor, and in most cases the ballot boxes were not collected within 24 hrs after the close of the polls.
- c) The conduct of some NEC polling officials was not professional due to ill preparedness and not being fully abreast with the process. Our Monitors discovered that in some areas some irregularities were caused by omission, wrong calculations, wrong recording, and/or fatigue. For instance, at a Polling centre at Adonkia School in the Western Rural District, the PO recorded zero (0) for one of the two leading political parties but when the observers challenged the entry and a recount was conducted, the PO admitted it was a mistake. This almost created tensions and suspicion.
- d) During the registration, we observed that NEC was moving trainees to distant locations without giving them enough transport refunds. For instance, moving potential trainees from Gbanti Kamaranka or Makary Gbanti Chiefdom in the Bombali District for training in places like Kamakwe in the new Karina District was too far. Some of the trainees were forced to walk the distance from Makeni to Kamakwe and not all of them were selected for the job at the end. We believe that such a practice was unfair.
- e) There were huge gaps in the job descriptions for some of the NEC polling agents. Some were working while others could not because they did not have a clear job description.
- f) Some of the polling centres within the western area were too tight and with very limited space for effective work.
- g) There were reported cases of violence and intimidation against the CDP Mayoral candidate in Makeni City, Mary Yabonette Conteh, who reportedly received death threats, and the Presidential Candidate of the Alliance Democratic Party (ADP), Mohamed Kamaraimba Mansaray who was also reportedly subjected to physical attacks

on his person and property by alleged ruling party elements. Our Monitors have documented these unfortunate events.

- h) The recount and the Data Processing at the Tally Centre should have been projected on big screens instead of the small screens used, so that observers and the Media would have a better view of the real time updates.
- i) Party observers and Police officers should clearly understand their mandate on polling day. Police Officers have no business in interfering with the Polls. However, we must state that in spite of few incidents of excessive use of force by the Police, including the arrest of opposition party members at Ross Road, a good number of the Police did a good job.
- j) We observed that there were mistakes in the printing of Ballots papers, in relation to serial numbers for the following:
  - i) Constituency 123 and the C4C MP candidates
  - ii) Mayoral candidates in Bonthe and Councillors in other districts
  - iii) The security features and serial numbers on some of the voting materials and the IRR forms had some inconsistencies. Though it had very little to do with the final result, a recurrence may create suspicion amongst party agents. This can be easily avoided if the printing is done properly.
  - iv) In the early hours of March 7 there were some delays which led to long queues because some voter names were not on the polling station register but were on the Master register.
- k) Tension mounted among the populace after 75% of the results were announced by the National returning officer and some citizens were engaged in hate speech and other forms of bigotry.
- l) Voter education was very low and this led to more than 5% void votes.
- m) Our monitors observed that in some polling stations, e.g. Regent Community centre in the Western Rural District, the ballot papers finished before 4pm and there were more than 120 voters with valid voter ID who were disenfranchised because the Presiding officer was waiting for the Area Coordinator to give him instructions to use the supplementary ballot papers. This must have led to over voting in other parts of the Country where the same problem occurred
- n) The Voter ID cards were not perforated

## **2. Going forward – Our Recommendations and Action Required**

- a) We are demanding that NEC publish the full details of the 221 polling stations that the National Returning Officer has “excluded” or cancelled due to over voting in accordance with section 87 (2) of the Public elections Act. The Voters have the right to know for the credibility of the process.
- b) We also demand a speedy prosecution of all NEC officials who were caught in electoral malpractices a week before the run-off to the second polls, and a crash training program be conducted for most of the new staff across the Country.
- c) UNDP /NEC should ensure the ballot paper printed in South Africa is done properly and that quality assurance checks are conducted on the ballot papers to prevent avoidable mistakes we have not seen since 1996 polls.
- d) We want the elections that were cancelled to be conducted on March 27, the day for the runoff elections, to avoid extra cost and proper voter education done in Constituency 123 for MP and the Bonthe District Chairman in Ward 253.
- e) The clearing, recounts, audit, archiving and Data processing at the tally centres should be made available on a big screen within the entry and tally centres.
- f) There were complains of people voting on behalf of others so we recommend that NEC re-introduce perforating machines.
- g) We recommend that the National returning officer should try to avoid calling results after 5:30 p.m for security reasons.



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- h) The Lighting system used in the polling centres also contributed to the minor calculation errors. Therefore, we recommend the procurement of brighter Solar lamp or usage of better lighted facilities than the ones used.
- i) To avoid counting at night under poor lighting, we strongly recommend that polling close by 3:30 p.m. The runoff is not a multiple election so the time spent inside the polling station will be 3 times less than the times spent in the March 7 Polls.
- j) The collection of ballot boxes should not exceed 24 hrs from the polling centres and children should not be allowed as carriers to transport ballot boxes.
- k) We demand that all the NEC officials who are suspected for aiding irregularities should be speedily prosecuted. This will serve as a deterrent for any other NEC staff in the runoff.
- l) We are calling on the NEC Chairman to give us accurate figures in the 2 decimal places as it was done with the 50% and 75% as this will give an accurate statistics and ranking, thereby easily eroding any suspicion in calculations.

### Conclusion

We would like to condemn all forms of Political violence as we don't want any loss of life or human right violations, We also want to remind political actors that we are gathering evidence that we shall use to prosecute Political actors who fuel violence and engage in so the forms of human rights violations in the International Criminal Court. We are also monitoring the social media for all those who are propagating hate speech or fanning the embers of ethnic and tribal bigotry to provoke conflict. We shall give the names and evidences to the International Criminal Court (ICC) as Sierra Leone is a signatory to the relevant International instruments.

Finally, we would like to congratulate Rtd. Brigadier Julius Madaa Bio of the SLPP, and Dr. Samura Kamara of the APC for their reconciliatory messages after the pronouncement of the final result. We also thank our 560 Monitors across the Country for sacrificing their time to access hard to reach areas to gather information for us and most especially for our exit polls in the Swing and Battle Districts. Against that backdrop we hope the NEC will continue to make Sierra Leone proud in the eyes of the International community, for conducting one of the most free, fair and credible elections in Africa. We also want to thank our fellow Civil Society Organisation and the Media for a job well done

Alluta Continue till we see the end of the run-off

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