

Sierra Leone General Elections

7 March 2018

and

Sierra Leone Presidential Run-Off Elections

31 March 2018



The Commonwealth



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Letter of Transmittal: Sierra Leone General Elections.....	v
Letter of Transmittal: Run-Off Presidential Elections.....	vii
Timeline of Events: Sierra Leone General and Run-Off Presidential Elections 2018	ix
Executive Summary	xi
Chapter 1	1
INTRODUCTION	1
Chapter 2	3
POLITICAL BACKGROUND	3
Lead Up to 2018 Elections	4
Constitutional Review.....	4
The Dismissal of the Vice President	4
The Appointment of APC Flagbearer	5
The Emergence of New Political Parties	5
Case Against the National Grand Coalition’s Presidential Candidate	5
Case Against the All People’s Congress Presidential Candidate.....	6
Intra-Party and Inter-Party Conflicts.....	6
Election Security	7
Conflict Prevention Initiatives.....	7
Party Campaigns	8
Political Parties	8
Chapter 3	9
ELECTORAL FRAMEWORK AND ELECTION ADMINISTRATION	9
Background	9
Legal Framework and International and Regional Commitments.....	9
The National Electoral Commission.....	10
Eligibility and Voter Registration	10
Candidate Eligibility and Nomination	11
Boundary Delimitation.....	11
The Political Parties Registration Commission	12
Complaints, Appeals and Election Petitions.....	12
Inclusive Participation and Representation.....	12
Key Issues and Observations	13
Recommendations	15
Chapter 4	17
THE MEDIA AND ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN.....	17
Political Party Debates.....	17
Campaign Environment.....	18
Media and Peace.....	18
Media Coverage of Political Parties.....	18
The Independent Media Commission (IMC).....	19
The Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ)	19
Recommendations	20

Chapter 5	21
VOTING, COUNTING AND RESULTS TABULATION	21
Background	21
Key Procedures for Opening and Voting	21
Assessment of the Opening of the Polls and Voting	22
Key Procedures for Closing and Counting.....	23
Assessment of Closing and Counting.....	24
Key Procedures for Tabulation of Results - Regional Tallying Centres	24
Assessment of the Results Tabulation - Regional Tallying Centres	26
Overview of the Countrywide Observation.....	26
Presidential Results - First Round	32
Recommendation.....	32

REPORT - SIERRA LEONE
RUN-OFF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION
31 March 2018

Section 1	34
INTRODUCTION	34
Section 2	34
BACKGROUND TO 31 MARCH RUN-OFF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS	34
Citizenship Legal Challenge.....	34
Allegations of irregularities in the conduct of 7 March Elections	35
The Relations Between the NEC and Sierra Leone Police	35
Postponement of the 27 March Run-off Presidential Elections	36
Election violence	36
Section 3	37
VOTING COUNTING AND RESULTS TABULATION.....	37
Assessment of the Opening and Voting	37
Assessment of the Counting and Results Tabulation	37
The Results: Run Off.....	38
ANNEX I: Biographies of Chairperson and Observers	39
ANNEX II: Deployment Plan	43
ANNEX III: Joint Communiqué	44
ANNEX IV: Interim Statement: General Elections - 7 March 2018	46
ANNEX V: Deployment Plan: Run - off Presidential Elections - 31 March 2018.....	52
ANNEX VI: Interim Statement: Run - off Presidential Elections - 31 March 2018 ..	53

Letter of Transmittal: Sierra Leone General Elections

Commonwealth Observer Group Sierra Leone General Elections 7 March 2018

10 March 2018

Dear Secretary General,

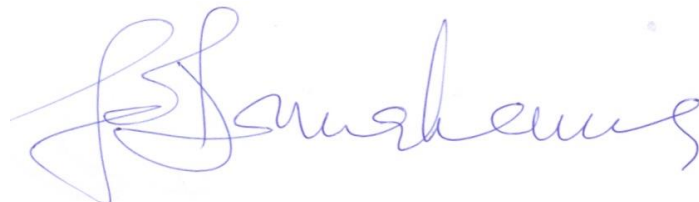
As Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group to the 7 March 2018 General Elections in Sierra Leone, I am pleased to submit to you our Final Report.

These elections were the fourth multi-party elections held in Sierra Leone, since the end of the decade-long civil conflict in 2002. Notably, these were the first elections to be managed entirely by national authorities following the departure of the United Nations mission in 2014. With the emergence of some new political parties and candidates, the elections were competitive and fiercely contested. We noted commendable local peace efforts by the Peoples Political Party Registration Commission (PPRC), which I had the honour of presiding over. These efforts brought together the Presidential candidates to sign the Freetown Declaration, a pledge for peace and non-violence. These efforts were instrumental in ensuring a peaceful environment during the elections.

We commend and congratulate the Sierra Leonean voters for the peaceful and orderly manner in which they exercised their franchise. We were impressed by the professionalism and transparency of the Electoral Commission and polling staff in the management of the process. We observed the participation of the elderly, and disabled voters, presence of women and youth as voters and officials.

The Group's overall assessment is that the electoral process as a whole, was credible, transparent and inclusive. In accordance with our mandate, we submit our detailed findings and recommendations in the attached report to help further strengthen the electoral process in Sierra Leone. We hope that these findings are received in the constructive spirit in which they are offered.

On behalf of the Commonwealth Observer Group, and in my own name, I would like to express our gratitude for the opportunity to contribute to the democratic process in Sierra Leone.



HE John Dramani Mahama
Chairperson



Alice Mogwe



Christopher Fomunyoh



Harold Acemah



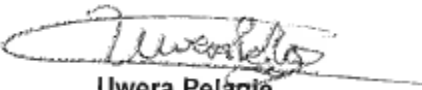
John Walters



Marjorie Walla



Charmain Naidoo



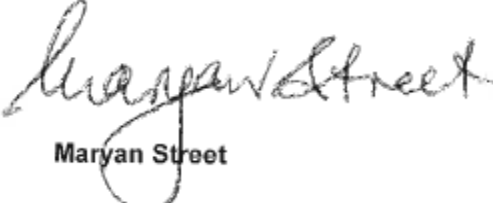
Uwera Pelagie



Felling Makeka



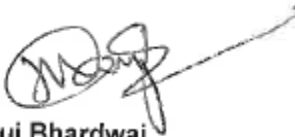
Paul Dacey



Maryan Street



Jeannine Comma



Manuj Bhardwaj



Idayat Hassan



Eric Kwa

Letter of Transmittal: Run-Off Presidential Elections

Commonwealth Observer Group Sierra Leone Run-Off Presidential Elections 31 March 2018

2 June 2018

Dear Secretary General,

We have completed our Final Report on the 2018 General Elections in Sierra Leone, and are pleased to submit it to you. The Report encapsulates the Group's observations and findings on the first round (General Elections) and the run-off Presidential elections. This extended Report reflects the fact that Commonwealth Observers were in Sierra Leone between 28 February and 3 April 2018 for the first and second round of elections, as none of the Presidential candidates attained the 55% threshold required for election as president in the first round under Sierra Leone's Constitution.

We were pleased to have found the first round election that took place on 7 March 2018 to have been credible and consistent with the international standards to which Sierra Leone has committed itself.

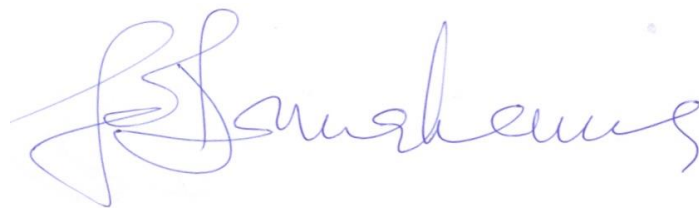
We noted with some disappointment, that the pre-election period leading to the 31 March run-off Presidential election was marred by the increased use of divisive language and calls for mobilisation around ethnic lines. Additionally, there seemed to be efforts to undermine the credibility of the National Electoral Commission by some stakeholders. We found these developments most worrying and disappointing, especially within the context of Sierra Leone's recent past.

The 31 March Run Off Presidential Election was generally peaceful and inclusive. We commend the people of Sierra Leone for the spirit in which they participated in this election.

Our overall conclusion is that the processes observed were credible and transparent. We have however provided a number of recommendations within our enclosed reports for how the process could be further strengthened for future elections.

It has been an honour and a privilege to serve the Commonwealth in this way and hope that our recommendations will be received in the constructive spirit in which they are intended.

I would also like to give my special thanks to the staff team who provided invaluable support to the Group.



John Dramani Mahama
Chairperson



Julius Nkafu



Maria Morry



Mandla Mchunu

Timeline of Events: Sierra Leone General and Run-Off Presidential Elections 2018

21 January	Dual Citizenship Challenge: An All People’s Congress (APC) parliamentary candidate for the Kambia constituency challenged (at District Electoral Commission) the candidacy of the National Grand Coalition’s (NGC) presidential candidate on grounds that he did not fulfill the candidate eligibility requirements; alleging that he had dual citizenship.
24 January	Dual Citizenship Challenge: The District Electoral Commission Returning Officer for Kambia ruled that the evidence provided to disqualify NGC presidential candidate was insufficient.
January/February	Dual Citizenship Challenge: The ruling by the Election Commission District Returning Officer was appealed at the National Electoral Commission (NEC) Headquarters. The NEC upheld the earlier decision by its District Office, noting that there was no material difference in the evidence submitted. The matter was then taken to the Supreme Court.
28 February	Presidential Peace Pledge: To promote a peaceful process, the signing of a peace pledge by all the presidential candidates was initiated. The event was facilitated by the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC) and presided over by HE John Dramani Mahama, the former President of Ghana.
5 March	Dual Citizenship Challenge: During the Supreme Court hearing, one judge recused herself while another judge was ordered to recuse himself. The latter was due to an application for recusal made by Counsel for the NGC’s Presidential candidate. The court was adjourned pending the replacement of the two judges.
7 March	General Elections are held.
13 March	Elections Results Certified: National Electoral Commission certifies the final results of 7 March General Elections. As no candidate receives 55 per cent of valid votes, according to the Constitution, a run-off election must be held within 14 days between the two leading candidates. The Electoral Commission announced that the <i>Run-off Presidential Election is scheduled for 27 March.</i>
14 March	NEC releases Run-Off Presidential Election campaign calendar
20 March	High Court Injunction: A private citizen files an Originating Notice of Motion with the High Court alleging widespread fraud in the electoral process and requesting a forensic audit of the entire electoral process. The Motion also requested that the Court order the NEC to implement a number of safeguards in the results management process. In addition, the applicant requested an injunction preventing

	the NEC from conducting the 27 March Run-Off until the substance of the case is finalized.
21 March	NEC issues a statement alleging police intimidation and obstruction from performing duties.
22 March	Sierra Leone Police issues a statement countering the claims by NEC.
24 March	High Court Injunction: High Court of Sierra Leone issues an interim injunction against the conduct of the Run-Off Presidential election, scheduled for 27 March.
24 March	NEC issues a statement informing the public that while legal proceedings were ongoing, it would continue its practical and logistical preparations for the run-off.
24 March	NEC issues another official statement informing the public that it had received official notice of an interim injunction against the conduct of the run-off Presidential election. The NEC noted that it would temporarily cease all logistical preparations for the run-off.
26 March	High Court Injunction: High Court vacates the interim injunction but issues orders guiding the conduct of the run-off election.
26 March	NEC issues a statement informing the public about the resumption of election preparations and informs the public that due to the logistical delays they would not be able to hold elections on 27 March but sought a new date of 31 March.
28 March	NEC issues a statement assuring voters that polling for the run-off election would take place on 31 March as scheduled.
31 March	Run-off Presidential Election is held.
4 April	President Maada Bio is sworn in.
12 May	Inauguration Ceremony for President Maada Bio.

Executive Summary

Elections are one of the most vibrant and participatory expressions of citizens' democratic rights. While international election observation expresses the interest and commitment of the international community in supporting a member state in the strengthening or consolidation of its democracy.

More specifically, the value of international election observation extends beyond the immediate impact of observers' presence on polling day to the recommendations that the observers can offer to help enhance the robustness of the electoral process.

The Commonwealth Observer Group for the 7 March 2018 General Elections was present in Sierra Leone from 28 February - 13 March 2018. As part of its terms of reference, the Group assessed the various aspects of the electoral cycle against the national, regional, Commonwealth and international standards for democratic elections that Sierra Leone has committed itself to. In doing so, the Group consulted a range of national stakeholders and other election observer missions in its briefing sessions in Freetown, and subsequently, in the five provinces of Sierra Leone.

These consultations, as well as the Group's observations ahead of and on Election Day, informed the Group's assessment of the electoral process. The Group's recommendations for strengthening Sierra Leone's electoral processes and the environment within which they occur, are offered in the spirit of contributing to the deepening of democracy in Sierra Leone.

As the Commonwealth is committed to advancing norms and principles for good governance including in electoral standards, in the spirit of noting best practices, we highlight below some of positive aspects that were observed which we believe enhanced Sierra Leone's electoral process and should therefore be commended but we also do note some of the challenges that require closer scrutiny in order to continue to strengthen Sierra Leone's processes and institutions.

Confining the Voters' Register

As with most elections, the accuracy and integrity of a register has an impact on the confidence of the electorate in the Commission managing the process, which relates to their confidence in the integrity of the overall process.

For the 2018 General Elections, the final Voters' Register listed 3,178,663 voters. On Election Day in order to streamline and expedite the process, the Electoral Commission, limited the total number of eligible voters per polling station to 300.

Overall, the Group found this measure to be a very positive aspect of the process. As these elections were tripartite; with voters receiving ballot papers for presidential, parliamentary and local government candidates, the prospect for confusion and delays were present. Therefore, a measure reducing the volume of voters seemed to provide polling officials sufficient time to support voters as needed.

In addition, although most polling stations observed opened with long queues; due to this measure most voters had cast their ballots by mid-day. Consequently, there were little to no queues at the close of polls, enabling most polling stations to close on-time. Moreover, as voting concluded at 17:00 and since most polling stations were able to close on time; in

most stations observed there was adequate lighting to enable an efficient and transparent closing and counting process.

Vibrant and Engaged Civil Society

In democracies, civil society plays an important role in monitoring, advocating, and informing the public of its civic rights and responsibilities for safe-guarding their democracy.

The Group was pleased to note that Sierra Leone has a very diverse, vibrant and engaged civil society. From Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities' Groups advocating for greater inclusion and participation of their respective constituents to citizen observer groups contributing to the strengthening of the electoral process through the observation.

The Group was also pleased to note the positive and substantive contributions of national organisations such as the National Elections Watch, the 50/50 Group and the Women's Situation. It is to the credit of these organisations and the people of Sierra Leone that election day turned out to be a peaceful and orderly process.

Mobilising Voters Along Ethnic Lines

The polarisation of issues along ethnicity, as well as the use of divisive language by several stakeholders, calls for mobilisation around ethnic lines and more localised incidents of politically-motivated violence was a most worrying and disappointing development that was noted during these elections.

Within the context of Sierra Leone's recent past, political party leaders, Church Groups, the media, Civil Society organisations, among others, have a leadership role to play in fostering Sierra Leone and the Commonwealth's shared values of unity, tolerance and respect.

Vehicular Restriction on Election Day

Elections remain one of the most vibrant and participatory expression of citizens' democratic rights, and therefore any measure that seeks to curtail or restrict citizens' movement during this particular day, while constructive, could have the negative affect of inadvertently disenfranchising already marginalized groups such as the disabled or elderly.

On Election Day, a vehicle restriction and manned checkpoints were instituted. While the restrictions enabled a conducive security environment on the day, the cost of disenfranchising even one eligible voter seems too high. The Group therefore continues to urge that this provision is reviewed for future elections.

Overall Assessment

The Groups overall assessment of the voting and counting process at the polling stations on election day is that it was conducted in accordance with the laws of the Republic of Sierra Leone, in a credible, peaceful, inclusive and orderly manner.

We commend the people of Sierra Leone for the peaceful and orderly manner in which they exercised their democratic franchise.

We also commend the National Electoral Commission, civil society and other stakeholders for their professionalism, dedication and general contributions to ensuring the peaceful and credible conduct of these elections. Many of the key benchmarks for democratic elections were met.

The following recommendations are offered for addressing some of the shortcomings observed, particularly in the pre-election and results phases, and more generally, to further strengthen democracy in Sierra Leone.

Electoral Framework and Election Administration

- The statutory and regulatory framework of the Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone as outlined in the Constitution, and the Public Elections Act 2012, should be reviewed, with a view to enabling the Commission's capacity to fully exercise its administrative and oversight functions in accordance with national provisions and international standards.
- As in 2012, a review of the Public Elections Act 2012 to identify areas where amendments may be necessary in order to further strengthen the electoral process.
- Noting the effect of the increase of candidate nomination fees on certain groups, we urge the Electoral Commission to review the impact of such measures on the inclusiveness of the candidate nomination process in the 2018 election, in order to guide the formulation and implementation of future policies or measures.

Inclusive Participation and Representation:

- Noting the important role that political parties can play in addressing gender imbalance in political leadership, we urge that political parties in Sierra Leone to commit to the necessary measures required to achieve gender balance in their own decision making structures and processes.
- It is recommended that consideration be given to the introduction of mandatory quotas to increase the representation of women Parliamentary and Local Councils level as one practical measure for achieving a gender balance at these levels of decision-making.
- It is recommended that political parties consider the establishment of a fund for women and youth to enhance their political representation at local and national government.
- Noting the effect of the increase of candidate nomination fees on certain groups, we urge the Electoral Commission, to review the impact of such measures on the inclusiveness of the candidate nomination process in the 2018 election, in order to guide the formulation and implementation of future policies or measures.

The Media and Electoral Campaigns

- Media training on elections coverage to strengthen professionalism and the media's ability to report fairly and responsibly is encouraged.
- Consideration should be given to the repeal of the criminal libel offence.
- Mechanisms should be put into place to strengthen adherence to the Code of Practice during elections.

- Capacity building programme to strengthen the Media Commission's ability to monitor and enforce the Code of Practice is encouraged.
- State-owned media should comply with its statutory duty to provide equal airtime to all political parties during elections. This could be done by publishing detailed guidelines on how it intended to ensure their coverage meets the benchmarks of regulatory statutes on media and elections.
- Consideration be given to viable and enforceable sanctions for Journalists who do not comply with their Code of Practice.
- As the PPRC is established as an autonomous body, it is recommended that consideration be given to a review of and strengthening of the legal and regulatory framework establishing and guiding the conduct of the PPRC with a view to empowering and enabling the Commission to hold political parties more accountable.

Voting, Counting and Results Tabulations

- Consideration should be given to the procedures for directing voters to their correct station. More training could be provided to the queue controllers or alternatives for guiding voters should be considered, including posting the voter's list under the corresponding station.
- Through written guidance and training the NEC can ensure that the procedures for receiving material post polling are consistently applied at all district offices.
- The NEC should continue to undertake civic education, particularly for older persons, new voters and marginalized groups.
- Without compromising the integrity and transparency of the process, NEC should consider ways and means to streamline and expedite the opening and closing processes.
- Where possible the NEC should ensure that all polling stations have adequate physical space as well as standard polling booths to ensure the secrecy of vote and security of the voter.
- NEC should ensure that all polling centres are clearly identified at the road side.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Following an invitation from the National Electoral Commission (NEC) of the Republic of Sierra Leone, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland, constituted an Observer Group for the 7 March 2018 General Elections in Sierra Leone. In line with usual practice, the Secretary-General sent an Assessment Mission to Sierra Leone to evaluate the prevailing situation as well as the pre-electoral environment, prior to her final decision on whether to constitute a Commonwealth Observer Group. The Assessment Team was in the country from 25 November to 1 December 2017.

The Commonwealth Observer Group was led by Mr John Dramani Mahama, former president of Ghana and comprised 14 eminent persons. A six-person staff team from the Commonwealth Secretariat supported the Observer Group. A full list of members is at Annex I.

Terms of Reference

“The Group is established by the Commonwealth Secretary-General at the request of the National Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone. The Group is to consider the various factors impinging on the credibility of the electoral process as a whole.

It will determine in its own judgement whether the elections have been conducted according to the standards for democratic elections to which the country has committed itself, with reference to national election-related legislation and relevant regional, Commonwealth and other international commitments.

The Group is to act impartially and independently. It has no executive role; its function is not to supervise but to observe the process as a whole and to form a judgement accordingly. It would also be free to propose to the authorities concerned such actions on institutional, procedural and other matters as would assist the holding of such elections.

The Group is to submit its report to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, who will forward it to the Government of Sierra Leone, the National Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone, and leaders of political parties, and thereafter to all Commonwealth Governments.”

Activities

The Observer Group was present in Sierra Leone from 28 February - 13 March 2018. During four days of briefings, the Group met with the National Electoral Commission, political party representatives, Office of National Security, civil society groups, women’s groups, youth representatives, media, the diplomatic community as well as domestic, regional and international observer missions. The Group observed the final rallies in Freetown prior to polling day.

The Observer Group was deployed across the five provinces of Sierra Leone from 5 to 9 March in the districts of Bo, Bombali, Karene, Kenema, Kono, Moyamba, Port Loko, Tonkolili, as well as both Western Area Rural and Western Area Urban districts in the capital, Freetown (see Annex II).

On deployment, Teams met with electoral officials, security services, citizen observers, other stakeholders at district level and members of the public to build up a comprehensive picture of the conduct of the process.

On 6 March 2018 the Chair attended a meeting of Heads of international election observation missions, held at the Bintumani Hotel. The meeting was chaired by ECOWAS and attended by the African Union, European Union, Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Southern Africa (EISA) and the Carter Centre. The observer missions exchanged views on the conduct of the elections.

Additionally, on 6 March a joint communiqué with the Chairperson and the Heads of other international election observation missions was issued. In this Communiqué observers called for all participants in the electoral process to refrain from any acts or statement that could cause tension or intimidation, and adversely affect the peaceful and orderly conduct of the elections (see Annex III)

On Election Day, the Chair visited the Situation Rooms established by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding, National Elections Watch and the Women's Situation Room.

On the basis of the Group's initial findings and observations, the Chairperson issued an Interim Statement on 9 March 2018 (see Annex IV). The Group's Final Report was completed in Freetown prior to departure and transmitted to the Commonwealth Secretary-General.

Chapter 2

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Sierra Leone became independent in 1961. Following independence, democratic development was interrupted by repeated military coups. The country was also devastated by a civil war, which took place between 1991 and 2002.

Since 2002, when the war ended, Sierra Leone has held several elections and the Commonwealth has observed all of them. The 2018 general elections are the fourth since the end of the civil war.

The first Parliamentary and Presidential elections following the end of the civil war were held in May 2002. The United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) provided advisory and operational support to the National Electoral Commission (NEC) in conducting those elections.

Thereafter, Sierra Leone held local government elections in May 2004 for the first time since they were abolished in 1972. These elections marked the reintroduction of local government and were held under the Local Government Act of 2004. This Act devolves powers to local councils in an effort to reduce the centralisation of power and decision-making in the capital.

The 2007 elections were landmark elections in Sierra Leone. These were the first elections since independence in which power was transferred peacefully from one elected civilian government to another. The elections were generally declared free and fair by international and local observers. However, some irregularities and isolated pockets of violence were noted during the Presidential election run-off. These elections were followed by Local Government elections in July 2008.

The 2012 elections in Sierra Leone were the first elections Sierra Leone had organised since the end of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone. It was also the first time that four elections namely Presidential, Parliamentary, Chairperson/Mayoral and Local Council were conducted simultaneously. Additionally, a new Voters' Register capturing biometric data was introduced by the NEC.

The Commonwealth Observer Group concluded that the November 2012 elections were conducted in a free, peaceful and transparent manner. However, the Group made several recommendations to help improve future elections in Sierra Leone. The following recommendations were made amongst others, some of which touch on the concerns, which remained relevant ahead of the 2018 elections:

- “We suggest that the NEC assesses the impact of vehicle restrictions on vulnerable groups for future elections.
- The NEC to put in place a consultative process with political parties and other stakeholders, including women, youth and disability groups, to arrive at a reasonable nomination fee before the next electoral cycle.
- Introduce legislation that allows for quotas to be set for women and youth, to increase their numbers in Parliament and Local Councils.

- Review the Public Electoral Act 2012 and identify areas where amendments may be necessary to further strengthen the electoral process.”

Lead Up to 2018 Elections

The March 2018 elections in Sierra Leone were the fourth since the protracted conflict, which ended in 2002. They were the second elections where Presidential, Parliamentary, Mayoral and Local Council were conducted simultaneously. In the lead up to these elections, several developments took place. These developments provide the context in which the 2018 elections took place. These include the following amongst others:

Constitutional Review

Sierra Leone is in the process of reviewing the 1991 Constitution. President Koroma officially launched the constitutional review process in July 2013 with the inauguration of the Constitutional Review Committee (CRC).

The CRC published an abridged version of its first draft report in February 2016 and it submitted the final report in 2017. It is expected that the recommendations of the CRC will be subjected to a public discussion and ratification through a national referendum. The CRC proposed the following amendments amongst others. If implemented, these recommendations¹ would have an impact on future elections:

- “A citizen by birth shall not lose citizenship by acquiring the citizenship of another country.”
- “There shall be a fixed date for holding national elections.”
- “Loss of party membership shall not nullify from Office a sitting President or Vice President.” (This amendment if accepted will be crucial in ensuring that intra-party politics do not affect elected officials.)
- “The members of the Electoral Commission shall be a Chief Electoral Commissioner, who shall be the Chairman, and four other members who shall reside in the regions and shall be referred to as Regional Electoral Commissioners.” (The objective of CRC’s recommendation is to enhance NEC’s accountability and accessibility.)
- “The Commission (PPRC) shall be responsible for the registration of all political parties and for that purpose may make such regulations as may be necessary for the discharge of its responsibilities under this Constitution. Its functions shall include setting candidate fees for Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Council elections in consultation with the National Electoral Commission.” (Currently the PPRC is responsible for the registration and conduct of the political parties and its mandate is not regulatory. The CRC made the recommendation to extend the PPRC’s mandate to make it robust and effective.)

The Dismissal of the Vice President

In March 2015 President Bai Koroma removed the Vice President Samuel Sam-Sumana from office. Sam-Sumana was accused of abandoning his duties when he reportedly sought political asylum at the US Embassy in Sierra Leone. It was reported that Mr Sam-Sumana had

¹ The CRC recommendations were culled from its abridged Report of 2016

sought asylum in the US because he feared for his life. The President was criticised locally for dismissing his deputy, some arguing that the dismissal was unconstitutional.

There were arguments that the Vice President could only be removed through a Parliamentary impeachment, while those supporting the Presidency argued that the President had the constitutional authority to dismiss his deputy.

The then ruling All Peoples Congress (APC) had earlier expelled Mr Sam-Sumana for alleged anti-party activities. The Vice President had denied the allegations and challenged his dismissal at the Supreme Court.

On 9 September 2015, the Supreme Court of Sierra Leone ruled that the dismissal was constitutional. This was a landmark ruling which allegedly brought clarity on the various interpretations of the relevant sections of the 1991 Constitution (as amended).

Mr Sam-Sumana filed a petition to the ECOWAS Court in Abuja, Nigeria, challenging his dismissal. In November 2017, the ECOWAS Court ruled that Mr Sam-Sumana's removal from office as Vice President by President Koroma was wrongful and violated his fundamental human rights to a fair hearing and to participate freely in the politics of his country. The ruling by the ECOWAS Court brought concerns about the independence of Sierra Leone's Supreme Court to the fore. Some stakeholders informed the Commonwealth Pre-Election Assessment Mission, which took place in November 2017 that there was a general lack of confidence in the Supreme Court.

The Appointment of APC Flagbearer

The ruling APC held its party Convention in October 2017 to elect its flagbearer ahead of the March 2018 elections. In line with the party rules and procedures, each delegate present at the convention was expected to vote for their aspirant. However, it is reported that President Koroma in his capacity as the chairman of the APC, appointed Dr Samura Kamara, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs. This appointment attracted criticism about transparency in the selection process. There were reportedly about 28 candidates who aspired for APC's candidacy.

The Emergence of New Political Parties

Historically, the elections in Sierra Leone have always been a two-horse race between the governing APC party and the main opposition, Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP). However, the dynamics for the 2018 elections were likely to depart from the usual contest dominated by the two main parties as new political parties joined it. The emergence of the new political parties raised the stakes for the 2018 elections. The new political parties included the National Grand Coalition (NGC), a splinter party from the SLPP led by Kandeh Kolleh Yumkella and Coalition for Change (C4C) led by Samuel Sam-Sumana, the former Vice President. Another new party is the Alliance Democratic Party (ADP), a break-away party from the ruling APC led by Mohamed Mansaray. These new political parties have widened the democratic space and are predicted to change the political landscape.

The Case Against the National Grand Coalition's Presidential Candidate

Kandeh Kolleh Yumkella, the former United Nations Under-Secretary-General and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sustainable Energy for All, formed the NGC along with other officials who defected from the SLPP. The NGC was officially registered in October 2017. Yumkella was elected as the flagbearer of NGC at the party's Convention, which was held in November 2017.

The ruling APC candidate for the Kambia Constituency 62, filed an application calling for the disqualification of Kandeh Yumkella on the grounds that he holds dual citizenship of the Republic of Sierra Leone and the United States of America. According to the 1991 Constitution, “No person shall be qualified for election as a member of Parliament if he is a naturalised citizen of Sierra Leone or a citizen of a country other than Sierra Leone, having become such a citizen voluntarily or is under a declaration of allegiance to such a country.” Dr. Kandeh Kolleh Yumkella has publicly indicated that he has held dual citizenship but has since renounced his United States’ citizenship.

In response to this query, the District Returning Officer for Kambia ruled that there was insufficient evidence to reverse the provisional nomination of Yumkella. The ruling was made on 24 January 2018 and an appeal was subsequently filed at the Headquarters of the NEC in Freetown. On 29 January 2018, NEC Headquarters upheld the earlier decision by the Kambia District NEC Office, noting that there was no material difference in the evidence submitted and therefore would not disqualify Yumkella. The case was taken to the Supreme Court of Sierra Leone and was later withdrawn prior to the holding of the run-off presidential election.

The Case Against the All People’s Congress Presidential Candidate

Samura Kamara, who previously served as the Minister of Finance and Minister of Foreign Affairs, was appointed by President Koroma as the APC’s flagbearer at the party’s Convention in 2017. A petition was filed in the Supreme Court challenging his candidacy on the grounds of ineligibility. It is argued that he holds dual citizenship (UK and Sierra Leone) and that he was paid from the consolidated revenue fund since registering as a presidential candidate. His appointment by President Koroma is being challenged on the grounds that internal party processes were not followed. However, such a petition ought to have been filed within seven days of publication of the notice of nomination (the NEC published the provisional nomination of Presidential candidates on 29 January 2018). In this regard the lead counsel for the Plaintiffs filed papers in the Supreme Court seeking an extension of time to file a petition against the candidacy of Samura Kamara.

Stakeholders brought the above-mentioned cases to the attention of the Commonwealth Observer Group as potential evidence of the law being used to exclude people from running for office.

Intra-Party and Inter-Party Conflicts

During the briefings from various stakeholders, the Commonwealth Observer Group was informed about the intra- and inter- party conflicts, which occurred ahead of the March 7 elections. In particular, according to reports by these stakeholders, the relationship between the governing APC, its splinter party ADP and the main opposition SLPP, has been marred by violence. The Group was informed about several incidents including the alleged arson attack on ADP Headquarters.

Several interlocutors expressed concerns about the potential for these tensions to disrupt the electoral process, particularly on election day and during the post-election period, if not addressed adequately ahead of the elections. Some stakeholders underscored the lack of support from the police in investigating the alleged attacks.

Election Security

The issue of election security, in particular the conduct of police became a highly politicised issue and raised the stakes for the 2018 elections.

The Commonwealth Observer Group received a briefing from the Office of National Security (ONS) regarding the preparedness of the Security apparatus ahead of the elections. An integrated security strategy was adopted ahead of the elections to address election-related security issues. The ONS carried out periodic threat assessments to identify potential hotspots. Prior to the election the security status was increased to Level two.

Most stakeholders met by the Commonwealth Observer Group, including political parties and civil society organisations, expressed a concern regarding the neutrality of the police. The Group was informed about the heavy-handedness of the police towards some opposition parties while others alleged that the police were being used by the Government against the opposition parties. The alleged crackdown on opposition and the alleged bias in favour of the ruling party raised concerns about the independence, professionalism and capacity of the Sierra Leone Police to carry out their duties in a non-partisan manner.

Due to the lack of trust in the police, the main opposition Sierra Leone People's Party and the National Grand Coalition rejected the Memorandum of Understanding proposed by the police, to commit the political parties to a specific code of conduct and to agree on certain aspects of the security structure with the security agencies. In particular, the aforementioned opposition political parties were opposed to the imposition of the vehicular restriction on Election Day. A similar vehicular restriction had been applied in the 2012 Election in order to prevent the escalation of hostilities between marauding groups of opposing party supporters, according to some stakeholders. The political parties also expressed a concern that the police might be used by the Government to gain an unfair advantage. However, on Election Day, the Commonwealth Observer Group did not observe any undue advantage for the ruling party in the places where they observed the elections. The Group noted that while the vehicle restriction and manned checkpoints created a conducive security environment on Election Day, some citizens, in particular the differently abled persons, could have been disenfranchised (this issue will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three).

The concerns about the neutrality and professionalism of the police came to a climax on Election Day when an incident at Goderich resulted in a confrontation between the police and Sierra Leone People's Party supporters. The police and military besieged one of the offices of the Sierra Leone People's Party for several hours over allegations of sophisticated IT equipment being used to hack the National Electoral Commission's systems.

The Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group diffused the situation and the Group noted the disproportionate response by the police in handling this situation.

Conflict Prevention Initiatives

In advance of these elections, various stakeholders undertook several conflict prevention initiatives. These include the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC) and the Eminent Women of the Women's Situation Room, amongst others.

On its part, the PPRC facilitated the signing of the Freetown Declaration on 28 February 2018, which was presided over by HE John Dramani Mahama, former President of Ghana. Ahead of the signing ceremony, HE Mahama engaged the leadership of the political parties,

seeking their commitment to peaceful elections. The PPRC also established an Eminent Persons Group to engage in dialogue and mediation with the political parties.

Eight political parties of the seventeen contesting the elections, signed the Freetown Declaration, committing themselves to peace before, during and after the elections. The remaining political parties, which did not sign the Declaration on 28 February were expected to sign before the elections. While some of the political parties were represented at the signing ceremony, only the Presidential candidates were allowed to sign the Declaration and not their representatives.

The Eminent Women Group provides high-level diplomacy and interventions to election-related threats, which could undermine the peaceful environment. The Eminent Women engaged youth ahead of the elections under the Youth Peer-to-Peer Programme. This entailed sensitisation of youth about peaceful elections.

Peace jingles were played on television and radio. There were also posters displaying peace messages. In addition to these locally driven initiatives, the Heads of Election Observation Missions issued statements ahead of the elections, calling for peace and urging all participants in the electoral process to refrain from any acts of violence or intimidation.

Party Campaigns

The Group observed a range of rallies, billboards and posters advertising political party candidates. We did not observe any inter-party conflict although some incidents had been reported to us before the election. In general, the campaigning, which we observed, was peaceful and orderly. This was possible because of the restriction on opposing parties having their rallies on the same day. The parties were prohibited from holding rallies or other political activities on the day before the election. Parties abided by this restriction (this issue will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four).

Political Parties

The Constitution provides for the establishment of the PPRC to register and supervise the conduct of the political parties. Of the following political parties which were registered by the PPRC to participate in the Presidential, Parliamentary, Mayor and Local Council elections, 16 fielded Presidential candidates:

1. Alliance Democratic Party - ADP
2. All Peoples Congress - APC
3. Citizens Democratic Party - CDP
4. Coalition for Change - C4C
5. National Democratic Alliance - NDA
6. National Grand Coalition - NGC
7. National Progressive Democrats - NPD
8. National Unity Reconciliation Party - NURP
9. Peace and Liberation Party - PLP
10. People's Democratic Party - PDP
11. Peoples Movement for Democratic Change - PMDC
12. Republic National Independent Party - RENIP
13. Revolutionary United Front Party - RUF
14. Sierra Leone People's Party - SLPP
15. United Democratic Movement - UDM
16. United National People's Party - UNPP
17. Unity Party - UP

Chapter 3

ELECTORAL FRAMEWORK AND ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

Background

On 7 March 2018, Sierra Leoneans voted in tripartite elections, for the President, 132-members of Parliament and more than 450 members of Local Government Councils. These elections were the fourth General Elections held in Sierra Leone since the end of the decade-long civil conflict in 2002.

In Sierra Leone, executive power rests with the President, who is the Head of State, Head of Government and the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. The president is elected for a five-year term and can serve a maximum of two terms in office. The President is elected in a single national constituency.

According to the Constitution, a successful presidential candidate requires 55 per cent of valid votes cast in order to be duly elected. In the absence of the required majority, the two leading candidates go forward to a second round of voting no later than 14 days from the official declaration of results. No threshold exists in the second round, meaning that whichever candidate gets the majority of valid votes cast is declared the winner.

Legislative powers are vested in the unicameral Parliament. Following the establishment of two new districts, the number of districts increased from 14 to 16. Consequently, the Electoral Commission conducted a delimitation exercise in 2017 and 20 new constituencies were created. Parliament now consists of 132 single-member constituencies and 14 Paramount Chiefs. The institution of Chieftaincy is protected and guaranteed from abolition by the Sierra Leone Constitution.

The 132 elected members are elected for a five-year term from single-member constituencies on the basis of the first past the post electoral system.

Legal Framework and International and Regional Commitments

Sierra Leone's Constitution guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms, including freedom of expression, assembly, association, and participation in elections.

The following national legislation provide the legal and regulatory framework for the conduct of elections:

- The Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991
- The Public Elections Act 2012
- Persons with Disabilities Act 2011
- Local Government Act 2004
- Political Parties Act 2002

In addition, Sierra Leone has committed to some significant regional and international instruments and commitments relevant to the conduct of elections.

These include:

- African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights
- African Union Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa
- ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
- International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination
- Commonwealth Charter

The National Electoral Commission

Section 32(1) of the Constitution establishes the National Electoral Commission (NEC). The Commission is responsible for the conduct and supervision of the registration of voters, all public elections and referenda.

The NEC is empowered to make regulations by statutory instruments for the registration of voters, the conduct of presidential, parliamentary or local government elections, referenda and related matters, including registration for voting by proxy.

The Constitution guarantees the independence of the NEC in the exercise of its functions. The Constitution explicitly states in Section 132 that: “in the exercise of any function vested in it by this Constitution, the electoral commission shall not be subject to the direction or control of any person or authority”. However, its independence is balanced by the requirement for accountability. The Chief Electoral Commissioner is required to submit a report to Parliament at least once a year on its programme or work.

The NEC comprises a Chairman and four members known as Electoral Commissioners. The members of the NEC are appointed by the President through a consultative process (with all registered political parties) and their appointment is subject to the approval of Parliament. The Commissioners serve a five-year term, unless the member is prematurely removed for inability to discharge the function of office. The Electoral Commission also appoints District Returning Officers and Assistant Returning Officers to serve in the sixteen districts of Sierra Leone. The current Chair is Mr Mohamed Conteh.

Eligibility and Voter Registration

The eligibility requirement for voting in Sierra Leone is that a person must be on the ‘Register of Voters’. To be registered, a person must be a citizen of Sierra Leone, of sound mind and at least 18 years of age or will be 18 on the date of the holding of the next election.

Sierra Leone adopted a biometric voter register for the 2012 elections. In addition to the voter’s biographical data (name, date of birth, etc.) the voter’s photograph is on the register. For the 2018 General Elections, the Final Voters’ Register listed 3,178,663 voters.

Following the 2012 elections, the Government of Sierra Leone through the National Civil Registration Authority (NCRA) announced a national civil registration process, which would include the distribution of a national multipurpose Identification card. It was envisaged that this multipurpose ID card would also be able to serve as a voter ID card.

However, due to some logistical and financial challenges, the NCRA was unable to deliver these multipurpose ID card in a timely manner in accordance to the electoral timetable as provided by the NEC. Consequently, with funding support from UNDP, a joint civil and voter registration exercise was conducted from 20th March to 30th April 2017. Due to low turnout, Parliament requested for a two-weeks extension to enable more people to go through the process. The additional 14-days period ended on 30th April 2017. This exercise captured citizens who were eligible to vote (i.e. those already 18 years of age or older, and those that would be 18 by or before the 7th March. A total of 3,300 voter registration centres were used to register eligible Sierra Leoneans for the elections.

The Provisional Register, with a total of 3,128, 967 voters, was exhibited from 22nd - 31st August 2017 at Registration Centres across the country. During this period, those that had registered could verify or amend their details. The Final Voters Register listed 3,178,663 voters (52% women and 48% men) was certified on 7 September 2017.

Although not required for voting, for the 2018 elections, the Electoral Commission provided the electorate with a functional voter identification card.

Candidate Eligibility and Nomination

Presidency

The election of the President is by direct secret ballot. To qualify as a presidential candidate, one must be a citizen of Sierra Leone by birth; be a member of a political party; have attained the age of 40 years; and who is otherwise qualified to be elected as a Member of Parliament. A political party must nominate the candidate for presidency. The Vice-President, the running mate, is the Principal Assistant to the President in the discharge of his executive function and is designated by the presidential candidate before the elections.

According to the Constitution, for a candidate to be successful they must secure not less than 55 per cent of the valid votes cast in the first round. If no candidate secures the majority, then the two leading candidates will contest in a run-off.

For the 2018 elections, there were sixteen Presidential candidates, two of whom were women.

Parliament

To qualify as a parliamentary candidate, one must be a Sierra Leonean citizen by birth; at least 21 years of age; be a registered voter and able to speak and read English. Candidates can be sponsored by political parties or stand as independents.

For these elections, there were 795 parliamentary candidates, of whom 100 are women.

Local Government (Mayoral, Chairperson and Councillors)

The same nationality and age requirements for parliamentary candidates apply to the candidates contesting for local government seats. However, they must be normally resident in the locality in which they are contesting.

For these elections, there were 120 candidates for Mayor/Chairperson, of whom 18 were women. There were 2,623 candidates for Councillors, of whom 464 were women.

Boundary Delimitation

Section 38 of the Constitution empowers the Electoral Commission, acting with the approval of the Parliament signified by resolution, to delimit electoral constituencies and ward boundaries for the purpose of electing Members of Parliament and local councils. At the conclusion of the delimitation exercise, for the 2018 Elections, two new districts were established, increasing the total number of constituencies and local councils. As a consequence, Sierra Leone is now comprised of 16 electoral districts, which translates into 132 constituencies, 22 local councils and 446 wards.

The Political Parties Registration Commission

Parallel to the NEC is the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC), which is a body established in the Constitution. The PPRC comprises four members who are appointed by the President. The Political Parties Act 2002, outlines the institutional mandate of the Commission and these included the registration and supervision of the conduct of political parties in accordance with Sections 34 and 35 of the Constitution.

In conformity with the Political Parties Act 2002, the Commission in collaboration with registered political parties and civil society organisations established District Code Monitoring Committees to function as a forum for discussion of issues of common concern, including breaches of the Code before, during and after the elections.

Complaints, Appeals and Election Petitions

The Public Elections Act 2012, outlines electoral offenses liable for prosecution. These offenses include illegal and corrupt practices, such as bribery; treating; undue influence; personation; illegal voting; false statements; and intimidation. These offenses are punishable by a fine or imprisonment or both.

The Act also provides for a Code of Election Campaign Ethics, to guide political parties, candidates, and their supporters' conduct during the campaign period.

Additionally, the Act establishes an Electoral Offences Court whose jurisdiction is to try offenses committed under the Act. These offences range from those committed during voter registration to offenses committed during polling. The Electoral Offences Court, which is a division of the High Court, 'sits in such places in Sierra Leone as the Chief Justice may determine.' It is presided over by a High Court Judge or a retired Judge of the Superior Court or a Barrister or Solicitor who is qualified to hold office as a High Court Judge. Trials are by summary procedure and may be subject to appeal.

Election petitions may be presented for any election. Presidential election petitions are to be presented to the Supreme Court. Any citizen of Sierra Leone, who has lawfully voted, may present a presidential petition. A petition must be submitted within seven days of the declaration of official results.

Parliamentary and local government petitions are presented in the first instance to the High Court. A candidate, an aggrieved candidate or a registered voter may present a petition. Parliamentary petitions must be submitted within 21 days of the official declaration of official results. Decisions of the High Court may be appealed to the Court of Appeal. All petitions are heard in open court.

Inclusive Participation and Representation

The Commonwealth Charter and international human rights instruments recognise that gender equality and women's rights are essential components of human development and basic human rights. In Sierra Leone, these instruments provide the linkage between good governance and gender equality as a means of achieving sustainable democracy.

Gender

According to 2015 Census figures, women represent 50.7 per cent of the total population. Additionally, according to the Voters Register, women comprised 1,652,904, representing 52 per cent of eligible voters. While there are no legal obstacles to women standing as

candidates, they remain significantly under-represented in Parliament. In the last Parliament, of the 124 members there were only 14 female members, representing 8.9 per cent.

For these elections, at the Presidential level, only two of the 16 candidates were women while two of the 16 Vice Presidential candidates were women. At the Parliamentary level, of the 795 candidates only 100 were women and of the 100 female candidates eight ran as independents. At the Mayoral and Council Chairperson level, of the 120 candidates 18 were women.

Youth

The Sierra Leone Government defines youth to include those between 15 to 35 years of age. According to the 2015 Census report, young people represent 33 per cent of the population.

Persons with Disabilities

These General Elections were guided by the Peoples with Disabilities Act 2011, which outlined provisions for facilitating the participation of persons with disability and those requiring assistance to vote. According to the Act, the Electoral Commission must provide the necessary assistive devices and services for persons with disability.

To facilitate the inclusion and participation of peoples with disability such as the visually impaired, the NEC deployed tactile ballot guides. Braille guides answering frequently asked questions were also made available. On the day of elections, persons with disability were allowed to choose a person of their preference to assist them.

On accessibility, according to the Electoral Commission, wherever possible, polling centres would be on premises that were accessible to wheelchairs and for those who are facing mobility challenges. Ramps would also be used on premises that were not wheelchair-accessible and every polling station would have at least one voting screen that was lower, in relation to the height of wheelchairs and for those who needed to sit down while completing their ballot papers.

Key Issues and Observations

1. Legal and Electoral Framework and Court Cases

Generally, the Group noted with considerable satisfaction that the Sierra Leone General Elections were conducted in the spirit of the law and in accordance with the principles of the regional and international instruments.

However, it was noted that in advance of these elections, there had been discussions and efforts at electoral reforms. Specifically, the efforts and recommendations of the Constitutional Review Committee were highlighted by a number of stakeholders. The three-year constitutional review process produced 134 recommendations, which were submitted to the government in 2017. Some of the electoral recommendations included: changing the first-past-the-post parliamentary election system to a proportional representation system; facilitating the right to vote of Sierra Leoneans in the diaspora; eliminating parliamentary seats reserved for paramount chiefs that are indirectly elected (and creating a separate national representative body for them).

In response to the proposed recommendations, the government issued a white paper, rejecting 102 of the 134 recommendations, and those accepted were not substantive.

Additionally, the government's white paper sought to lower the threshold for the presidential election in a first round from 55 percent to 50 percent +1. The presidential threshold is not an entrenched clause in the Constitution and therefore modifying it does not require approval by referendum. Instead, a two-thirds vote of parliament would suffice to amend.

Faced with resistance from the opposition, civil society, and the international community the government abandoned the reform agenda; as they all argued that the government's proposals, particularly that of the threshold amendment was a blatant attempt to manipulate the electoral process in favour of the ruling party months before the elections.

The national legal framework is a critical basis for credible, competitive elections. International good practice advises against substantive changes to the national legal framework six to twelve months prior to an election.

In addition, it was also noted that there were some disconcerting pre-election legal challenges that remained unresolved and therefore potentially could have impacted the credibility of the process and outcome. First, there were at least two pending cases on the eligibility of political party flag bearers who were contesting in elections. Second, the vehicular ban, although the High Court issued a restraining order before the elections which was subsequently vacated, the Police had already begun planning and putting measures in place for the ban. Although the ban did not greatly affect the movement of people to exercise their franchise, it is important that this issue be resolved before the next elections.

2. Electoral Commission

Although the NEC was generally commended by the majority of the stakeholders as an independent and credible organisation, there were some concerns expressed about its ability to deliver the 2018 General Elections.

In advance of these elections, there were criticisms and concerns expressed regarding the operational capacity of the Commission and the perceived political interference by the government. Examples consistently cited included the delay in the provision of funds to the Commission by the government, as well as an apparent campaign by the ruling party to impugn and discredit the Commission. Additionally, the Commission's perceived cautious approach to public relations contributed to the frustration and criticisms.

Despite the criticisms and challenges faced by the Commission, the professionalism, dedication, and determination exhibited by not only the Commissioners but polling officials remains commendable.

3. Register of Voters

As with most elections, the accuracy and integrity of a Register has an impact on confidence of the electorate in the process and overall confidence in the Commission.

Although not required for voting, the issue of the voter ID cards to be used for these elections had been quite contentious due to funding delays and confusion over the type of card that was to be provided and by whom. As noted above, the delays and challenges faced by the NCRA in the provision of a national multipurpose Identification card was the source.

Consequently, the functional voter identification card provided by the Elections Commission was not well received as many thought that the Commission's voter ID cards were the

proposed multipurpose ID cards or at minimum a suitable replacement. Due to the very basic nature of the cards provided, the Commission was inaccurately criticised, when it was evident that the Commission had only intervened with a stop-gap measure to address a situation that the government had been unable to resolve.

4. Inclusive Participation and Representation

A number of stakeholders, particularly representatives of women and youth organisations indicated that the representation of both women and youth remains consistently low at the level of the parliamentary and in local councils. While no disaggregation of youth representation was available to the Group of observers, it was noted that women only made up 14 of the 124 Members of Parliament.

Additionally, it was noted that there were no temporary special measures such as the provision of voluntary or mandatory quotas, by the State or political parties to redress this under representation. The Group was informed that some of the parties had committed to the 30 per cent principle. However, many were unable to fulfil this intention.

With the number of women on the Register of Voters, and the relatively high number of women observed as election officials, non-partisan citizen observers, and party polling agents, it is very evident that women are active in the electoral process. It is commendable to note that the Commission was proactive in appointing women as election officials and the Group observed a gender balance among election officials in almost all the polling stations visited.

Another observation was the number of women among party polling agents, often making up a third or half the number of agents. The turnout of women on election days was notable, as they comprised the majority of voters at some polling stations observed.

While it was observed that women and youth participated in significant numbers in the election process the Group notes with concern that neither women nor youth appear to have equal access and opportunity to contest elections. The Group was also informed that no political party had a special fund to assist women and youth enter politics.

The Group observed in most Polling Centres people with disability were ably assisted to vote. It also observed youth's active participation in the election process as voters and as well as election officials.

Recommendations

Electoral Reform and Legal Framework:

- The statutory and regulatory framework of the Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone as outlined in the Constitution, and the Public Elections Act 2012, should be reviewed, with a view to enabling the Commission's capacity to fully exercise its administrative and oversight functions in accordance with national provisions and international standards.
- As in 2012, a review of the Public Elections Act 2012 to identify areas where amendments may be necessary in order to further strengthen the electoral process.
- As the PPRC is established as an autonomous body, it is recommended that consideration be given to a review of and strengthening of the legal and regulatory

framework establishing and guiding the conduct of the PPRC with a view to empowering and enabling the Commission to hold political parties more accountable.

Inclusive Participation and Representation:

- Noting the important role that political parties can play in addressing gender imbalance in political leadership, we urge that political parties in Sierra Leone to commit to the necessary measures required to achieve gender balance in their own decision making structures and processes.
- It is recommended that consideration be given to the introduction of mandatory quotas to increase the representation of women Parliamentary and Local Councils level as one practical measure for achieving a gender balance at these levels of decision-making.
- It is recommended that political parties consider the establishment of a fund for women and youth to enhance their political representation at local and national government.
- Noting the effect of the increase of candidate nomination fees on certain groups, we urge the Electoral Commission, to review the impact of such measures on the inclusiveness of the candidate nomination process in the 2018 election, in order to guide the formulation and implementation of future policies or measures.

Chapter 4

THE MEDIA AND ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN

Sierra Leone's local media has continued to rebound following the devastating impact of 10-year civil war. The media in Sierra Leone has grown in both numbers and diversity - with new actors entering the space in recent time.

In addition, technology has affected the way the media operates; producers and consumers of media content are able to use mobile phones and the internet to produce, distribute and consume content, often live; an element which featured significantly in the 2018 general elections.

There are more than 200 newspapers registered in Sierra Leone but a lack of financing due to low levels of advertising has contributed to approximately 25 to 30 of those newspapers being produced and circulated daily. Each sells approximately 2000 copies with circulation being primarily in Freetown and urban areas.

The vast majority of the population use radio as a source of information. There are over 50 radio stations covering both rural and urban areas. About forty of these are part of the Independent Radio Network (IRN) - together these stations provide coverage for most of the country.

There are three local television stations: Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC)-the public broadcaster, Star and Africa Young Voices (AYV) Television. Television is however hindered by poor signal quality and a limited reach. In the run up to and during the 2018 General Elections the media was vibrant, with newcomers in the media space playing a significant role in the political process.

Political Party Debates

As in 2007 and 2012, Sierra Leoneans were once again able to engage with political leaders through a series of debates. However, for these elections the difference was that they were broadcast live and distributed online.

Six of the sixteen presidential candidates contesting the elections were given a platform to share the vision of their political parties during the debates. This facilitated public dialogue on issues of concern to Sierra Leoneans.

The debates were organized by the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) in partnership with the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC) and local broadcaster Africa Young Voices (AYV). To participate in the debates parties were required to be fielding parliamentary candidates in 25 percent of constituencies.

There were however concerns that holding the debates in English as opposed to Krio could limit its impact, as Krio is the language used by the majority of the population. Concern was also expressed that the smaller parties had not been treated fairly having been left out of the debate.

Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC) organized a Presidential Debate for the 10 candidates who did not meet the criteria for participation in the national debate.

Young people and women from the main political parties were given a platform to share the vision of their political parties in debates. There were also programmes on AYV where young

people were given an opportunity to voice their concerns about the issues the country faced which they wished to be addressed by those seeking political office.

Campaign Environment

The Electoral Commission set the official campaign period from 4 February to 5 March 2018 in accordance with the 2012 Public Elections Act. While this campaign period was generally adhered to, the Group was informed that the ruling party allegedly engaged in countrywide tours which were tantamount to active campaigning before the official campaign period.

The election campaigns were competitive and fiercely contested. All political parties were obliged to adhere to a campaign calendar. This calendar was instrumental in minimising clashes during campaigns. However, there were allegations of non-compliance with the calendar by some political parties. The Group witnessed a few of the final political party rallies in Freetown and some of the provinces where they were deployed. During campaigns the political parties' supporters were clad in party colours. Campaign paraphernalia including billboards and posters were highly visible in all major cities and some rural areas throughout the campaign period. Many of the rallies observed occurred without incident.

However, during briefings with stakeholders, the Group was informed of some localised incidents of politically-motivated violence during this period.

Among the key issues which featured prominently during campaigning were corruption, education, unemployment, health care, environment and the state of the economy.

Media and Peace

Some sections of the media were also involved in promoting a message of peace through various kinds of programmes and in providing voter education. During the 2018 elections the media also teamed up with civil society partners and the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) to contribute to a situation room - aiming to identify and address issues on election day that could affect the peace, transparency and credibility of the elections.

Media Coverage of Political Parties

Despite the positive developments, there was however bias and unprofessional coverage of the election campaign in some sections of the media, with especially some newspapers backing specific parties and candidates. This is despite the presence of a Code of Conduct to which all licensed media entities are bound. The media code forbids media houses to carry political propaganda but instead requires fair, balanced and accurate reporting from all media entities.

The Public Broadcaster - Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC) has been singled out by some analysts for disproportionately allotting airtime to the ruling APC party while other political parties received minimal exposure. Additionally, the content of stories was seen to be biased towards the ruling party.

The sector also continued to face the ongoing challenges posed by poor signal quality, underinvestment in media sector, low levels of advertising and self-censorship because of criminal libel laws.

While an increase in local training programmes and certification in communication and journalism has resulted in an increase in professionalism in the sector, there continued to

be challenges with the quality of journalism in some parts of the media. Some representatives of both the media and the media monitoring institutions have allegedly openly supported the campaigns of specific political parties.

It is alleged that being poorly paid, some media practitioners have opted to support specific political parties in their coverage in the hopes of being rewarded with diplomatic placements overseas if their party should win.

Access to smart phone technology and social media broadcasting played both a positive and negative role in the way the campaign and the elections were covered.

On the positive side, the ability to stream live content on platforms like Facebook made it possible for media outlets to cover aspects of the campaign and elections - keeping the country informed of developments in real time. On Election Day journalists could be seen inside and outside of Freetown covering the elections.

The access which the media was given by the National Electoral process helped to create an open and transparent atmosphere for the elections.

It is noteworthy that an incident in Goderich, in which the Police and military besieged one of the offices of the Sierra Leone Peoples Party for several hours over allegations of sophisticated IT equipment being used to hack the Electoral Commission's systems was carried live on television, and the ability of citizens to record the incident on their phone called national and international attention to it.

The availability of WhatsApp and Facebook streaming also provided the opportunity for citizen journalists to create and circulate content. These content providers are not bound by the journalism code and have in some instances created fake news stories in support of their political parties.

The Independent Media Commission (IMC)

Sierra Leone's Independent Media Commission (IMC), the statutory body responsible for registering and monitoring the media in the legislated Code of Practice, specifically outlines that election coverage should be fair, balanced and accurate. Also, journalists should refrain from publishing or airing party or political propaganda without adequate research and fact-checking. The IMC also provides an alternative complaint mechanism to using the Public Order Act of 1965, under which journalists, editors and publishers can be jailed for criminal libel. Critics say the Act has been used to stifle freedom of expression and therefore contravenes the 1991 constitution.

The Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ)

The Sierra Leone Association of Journalists has a Code of Practice, which specifically states journalists must be responsible, accurate, independent and credible.

During the 2018 Elections, the team was of the view that the media in Sierra Leone is polarised, with outlets demonstrating a clear bias towards particular presidential candidates and parties.

It is the impression of the observer group that both public and private media outlets in Sierra Leone allotted time and space to political candidates in a generally unbalanced manner.

The Group notes that the Public Elections Act 2012; requires that during the election campaign period, the national radio and television stations are to provide equal airtime to each candidate and each political party.

Although there are more independent media outlets, the enforcement of this provision needs to be strengthened.

The Group notes the existence of criminal libel on Sierra Leone's statutes and wishes to point out a general movement in most Commonwealth countries towards a system of peer and other systems of regulation.

Recommendations

- Media training on elections coverage to strengthen professionalism and the media's ability to report fairly and responsibly is encouraged.
- Consideration should be given to the repeal of the criminal libel offence.
- Mechanisms should be put into place to strengthen adherence to the Code of Practice during elections.
- Capacity building programme to strengthen the Media Commission's ability to monitor and enforce the Code of Practice is encouraged.
- State-owned media should comply with its statutory duty to provide equal airtime to all political parties during elections. This could be done by publishing detailed guidelines on how it intended to ensure their coverage meets the benchmarks of regulatory statutes on media and elections.
- Consideration be given to viable and enforceable sanctions for Journalists who do not comply with their Code of Practice.

Chapter 5

VOTING, COUNTING AND RESULTS TABULATION

Background

On 7 March 2018, polling was scheduled to occur from 07.00 to 17.00 hours and was organized in 3,300 Polling Centres, which were sub-divided into 11,122 Polling Stations across the country. Polling stations were primarily located within or outside public facilities such as schools, churches and community centres. The Public Elections Act 2012 Act provides the framework for the conduct of elections.

Polling station staff comprised a Presiding Officer, a Polling Station Queue Controller, Voter Identification Officer, Ballot Paper Issuer One and Two and Ballot Box Controller One and Two. Additionally, an unarmed police officer was also to be present to manage law and order issues. Party agents, accredited citizens and international observers were also authorised entry into a station.

Each polling station was to contain four colour-coded ballot boxes (to match the colour coded ballot papers) - for the President, Members of Parliament, Mayoral/Council Chairperson, and Councillors elections. The total number of registered voters, per polling station was limited to 300.

The law required that political campaigning end twenty- four (24) hours before the polls open on Election Day.

Key Procedures for Opening and Voting

The key prescribed procedures for opening and voting are as follows:

Opening of the Polls

- Voting is officially scheduled to start at 07:00 hours
- Prior to the opening of the polls, the four transparent ballot boxes are shown to all-present to confirm they are empty; then the four corners of each box are sealed with numbered security seals.
- The seal numbers are recorded and provided to party agents and observers.
- Accredited party polling agents, domestic and international observers are allowed to be present for the opening.

Voting

- **Polling Station Queue Controller** - As voters line up in queues outside the polling stations, the Queue controller checks that the voter is at the correct polling station.
- **Voter Identification Officer** - Checks that the Voter's finger is not inked and verifies the details of the voter against the Register to ensure they are at the correct polling station. They also ask the voter to sign or thumbprint the Register.

- **Ballot Paper Issuer 1** - validates the Presidential and Parliamentary ballots with the official stamp, folds the ballot papers and then directs the voter to voting screen 1.
- Voting Screen 1 - Voter marks the two ballots, refolds them and then deposits the ballots into the corresponding box.
- **Ballot Paper Issuer 2** - validates the Chair/ Mayor and Councillors ballot with the official stamp, folds the ballot papers and then directs the voter to voting screen 2.
- Voting Screen 2 - Voter marks the two ballots, refolds them and then deposits the ballots into the corresponding box.
- **Ballot Box Controller 2** - The controller marks the left index finger of the voter with indelible ink and the voter then exits the polling station.

Assessment of the Opening of the Polls and Voting

On Election Day, observers reported a generally peaceful process that was well managed and transparent with voters free to exercise their franchise. Party agents, national, regional and international observers were largely present at the polling stations observed. Turnout of voters was higher at the outset of voting, with many voters arriving some hours before the opening of the polling station.

Some of the key observations of the teams were:

- Generally, in most of the polling stations observed, voting commenced on time and these stations were well managed.
- The Team was impressed by the conduct and professionalism of polling officials. The majority of the polling officials were competent and diligent in carrying out their duties.
- The Team was also encouraged to see the large number of young people and women employed as polling officials.
- At most polling stations observed, priority was given to people with disabilities, the elderly, the infirm, and pregnant women.
- The Register was credible, insofar as it accurately reflected, for the most part, the voters who had registered.
- The secrecy of the ballot was generally respected.
- While there did not appear to be any deliberate attempt to undermine procedures, there were some inconsistencies between polling stations in the application of procedures.
- Security was adequately provided and order was maintained at most polling stations observed. However, the Teams also noted that in some polling stations security personnel were armed.
- Where the polling centre was divided into polling stations based on an alphabetical split of the register, queue controllers should have been more proactive in assisting voters to identify their correct polling station before standing in line.

- In many polling centres the physical nature of the premises made it difficult for the polling place layout to conform fully with the guidelines issued by the NEC. However, in all polling stations observed by the Group, processes were put in place by Presiding Officers to ensure as far as possible the secrecy of the ballot.

Key Procedures for Closing and Counting

The key stated procedures for the closing and counting process were as follows:

- The polls were officially scheduled to close at 17.00 hours. However, voters waiting in line at the close of poll were allowed to vote and voting continued until the last person in line had voted.
- Following the last voter, the Presiding Officer closed the polling station and started the preparations for counting the ballots. Party agents, national and international observers were permitted to witness this process.
- The aperture of each of the ballot boxes were sealed and the numbers on each of the seals were reconfirmed.
- The polling station was rearranged to enable additional space and a clear view of the count process.
- The Presiding Officer completed a Reconciliation and Results Form (RRF) for each ballot box. The RRF noted the following information:
 - Total number of ballots per elections received
 - Number of unused ballots per election
 - Number of used ballots per election
 - Number of spoilt ballots
- The Counting Process consisted of five stages: **Screening, Reunification, Reconciliation, Sorting and Counting**. Each stage was applied separately to each ballot box.
- The Presidential ballot box was opened first.
- **Screening:** sorting and identifying misplaced ballots.
- **Reunification:** misplaced ballots were placed in the correct ballot box.
- **Reconciliation:** confirming that the number of ballot papers in each ballot box was equal to the number of ballots handed out to voters at that polling station. Additionally, all ballots were inspected for the official NEC stamp on the back of the ballot. Unstamped ballots were separated from the stamped.
- **Sorting:** the ballot papers were separated by candidates, and the validity of the ballot paper was also determined during this process. The unstamped ballots identified during the reconciliation process were placed with the invalid ballots. The valid and invalid ballots were determined based on the principle that “the ballot should be counted if the intention of the voter is clear.”
- Invalid ballots are:
 - Those without the official stamp on the back;

- Those with writing (name or signature) on the ballot paper by which the voter could be identified;
 - Those without a mark of any description indicating the voter's preference;
 - Those with multiple marks for more than one candidate.
- **Counting:** total votes for each candidate is obtained.
 - At the end of the counting process, the Presiding Office will pack the sensitive and non-sensitive materials, which are then given over to the Polling Centre Manager.
 - Sensitive materials include the following; marked ballot papers for each election, and the completed RRF for each election, as well as the unused ballot papers, spoiled and invalid ballots for each election.
 - For each election, the completed RRF, the marked ballot, unused ballots and, spoiled ballot are packed in Tamper Evidence Envelops (TEE). The sealed TEE is then placed in the corresponding ballot box.
 - The ballot box is then sealed, the four corners of each box is sealed with numbered security seals, with a fifth seal on the aperture on top of the box.

Assessment of Closing and Counting

The close and vote count at the polling stations was transparent, with party agents, citizen and international observers afforded a clear view of the entire process.

Some of the key observations of the teams were:

- The close and count process were transparent and inclusive, with candidates, party agents, national, regional and international observer groups welcomed to observe the process.
- To demonstrate their commitment to the transparency of the process, many polling officials slowly and deliberately communicated every aspect of the counting process to party agents and observers.
- Some Polling Officials appeared to find their duties at the close of voting challenging, with some officials taking a longer time to complete the process.
- The conditions for the count were not always conducive. For instance, in some areas there was insufficient light by the time the count was completed. Although officials were provided with battery operated lamps, it still made the task of the polling officials difficult.
- Additionally, in some districts there was heavy rainfall during the counting, which caused delays of the process.
- In some polling centres with multiple stations it was observed that some had different closing processes.

Key Procedures for Tabulation of Results - Regional Tallying Centres

The key stated procedures for the results tabulation process at the Regional Tallying Centres are as follows:

Material Intake

- District Election Officers are responsible for arranging the safe delivery of the Tamper Evident Envelope TEE from each polling station to the Tally Centre.
- TEEs should arrive in secure ballot boxes, bundled per Polling Centre, accompanied by a completed Material Transfer Form (MTF).
- TEE1 contains the Results and Reconciliation Forms for all elections in the polling station. TEE2 are sent to the National Returning Officer, while TEE 3 to the District Returning Officer: these envelopes contain carbon copies of the forms received at the Centre.
- Upon arrival of the material from each District, the Intake Team checks:
 - That the seal numbers of the ballot box/materials transfer box matches the accompanying MTF;
 - Announces seal numbers to any agents and observers present;
 - If the seal number matches the MTF then the Intake Team opens the box;
 - The team counts the TEEs inside the box and checks the number against the MTF;
 - The team checks the polling station codes against the codes recorded on the MTF;
 - Signs the MTF to confirm receipt of the TEEs listed on the MTF;
 - Inspects each TEE to ensure that it has not been opened, damaged or tampered with in any way;
 - Intake Clerk registers the TEE in the database by use of the polling station code.

IT Steps - 1st and 2nd Data Entry

- When the TEE is registered, the Team:
 - Opens the TEE;
 - Checks for the presence of the correct number and type of Reconciliation and Results Forms (RRF) for the polling station: one each of RRF1, RRF2, RRF3 and RRF4a or RRF4b;
 - Checks the codes on each RRF and confirms that all RRFs belong to the correct and same polling stations;
 - Reads out the serial number on each RRF for agents and observers present;
 - Enters the serial number of the RRF to the allocated space;
 - Checks that all required fields on the form are completed.

Once registration has been conducted and the saved the Intake Officer:

- Places the Presidential RRF on the 'Ready to send to 1st Data Entry' tray
- The other RRFs are placed in the Waiting tray
- Data Entry Clerks are responsible for the data entry of the RRFs into the database.

Form Review and Audit

- Sets of RRFs with at least one black sticker will be sent for Form Review. Form Review staff will identify within the set which RRF(s) have Data Entry black sticker(s) to review them.

- The Form Review Clerk:
 - Enters the Polling Station code in the database.
 - Selects one of the four options (RRF1, RRF2, RRF 3 and RRF4a or RRF 4b)
 - Then enters the figures exactly as written on the original RRF in the relevant boxes on the blank RRF
- Upon submission of the data, the database will re-check if the data makes mathematical sense. If cleared, the database will instruct the Form Review Clerk to apply blue stickers in the right-hand circle of both 1st and 2nd Data Entry boxes.
- The Form Review Clerks:
 - Applies the blue sticker in the right-hand circle of 1st and 2nd Data Entry boxes;
 - Places the set of RRFs in the Archive in-tray from where the Archive Clerks will collect it and take it to Archive.
- If the database does not accept the new data entry, the Form Review Clerk will receive a message on the screen to place black stickers on the form. The system will instruct this when there is a mathematical mistake, and the RRF will need to be sent to the Audit Clerk.

Archiving

- The Archive Area is organised by District, Ward and Polling Centre.
- The full set of Reconciliation and Result Forms (RRF) from each polling station for the four elections will be archived together. Forms will be assembled per their Polling Centre and kept in a paper folder. Each folder will have a pre-printed label that includes District name, Ward number, Polling Centre Code and the number of the polling station of that particular centre.

Assessment of the Results Tabulation - Regional Tallying Centres

Although the results process is ongoing, concerns around access, transparency and the lack of clarity on key procedural aspects of this process is a point of note for the Group. The Group is of the view that the tallying processes should be streamlined and simplified while not compromising integrity and transparency.

By design, electronic results management systems are not easily visible and traceable, unless results transmission transactions are reflected on screens as they happen for all to experience and observe. Consequently, observing and commenting on the results tabulation and transmission phase can be a challenge, as Observers cannot independently verify and thereby attest to the accuracy of the data transmitted.

It is the hope of the Group that the Commission will continue to be transparent and responsive to all key stakeholders regarding this very critical process.

Overview of the Countrywide Observation

Commonwealth teams were deployed to the five Provinces of Sierra Leone. Our teams observed the voting, counting and tabulation of results. They also met with electoral officials, observers and other stakeholders at the constituency level to build a broader picture of the conduct of the process.

Bo District

- *NEC Readiness:* Found the senior NEC officials in Bo district to be competent and skilled. They projected a high level of confidence and appeared to have all arrangements in hand. However, at the polling centres, the competence of the NEC staff was variable, which led to some delays in the opening of polling stations and the beginning of the voting process, but the staff became more confident and competent as the voting progressed.
- *Police and Security:* The Police were generally unobtrusive and supportive in Bo. However, at one polling station observed, at the beginning of polling, the Presiding Officer called for more Police backup because of delays in commencing voting and large numbers of people waiting in line. Additional Police arrived promptly but were not required to do anything. They provided reassurance for the NEC Officer.

There was a range of security personnel at different places. We observed Police, Military Police, Chieftain Police Department representatives especially in smaller villages, and the OSD.

- *Atmosphere and Surroundings:* The one political rally (SLPP) observed two days before Election Day was exuberant and lively but also peaceful and well organised. It appeared that there were some 5000 people in attendance. Police were absent or very unobtrusive. There was generally an air of excited anticipation because the SLPP Presidential candidate was expected in person. Party posters remained in place the day before Election Day, albeit somewhat dilapidated by that stage.
- *Polling Day:* The atmosphere was peaceful and calm even with extended queues in direct exposure to the sun. Delays in commencement of voting did not provoke unrest or impatience. There were no incidents, which caused concern. Most Polling Centres had completed 50-60 per cent or more of the voting of their registered voters by 2pm. Counting of votes after the closure of voting was cumbersome and repetitive and could be streamlined without compromising the integrity of the process.
- *Tally Process:* was slow and cumbersome with very little information being provided to observers in a timely way. Heavy rains impaired the logistics of getting ballot boxes back to the regional NEC Centre. Ballot boxes were kept overnight at the NEC District Office under the supervision of the District Electoral Officer (DEO). There was some concern that some of the TEE envelopes were sealed differently from others, indicating the possibility of tampering. These were referred to the DEO for investigation.

Bombali District

- *Secrecy of Voting* - The Team found that in many of the polling stations observed, the secrecy of the vote was not always guaranteed. Some polling booths were not positioned in a manner as to enable the secrecy of the vote. For instance, at one of the polling stations observed, a piece of cloth was placed near a wall where the voter would pull it up and stand behind it to mark their ballot.
- *Transparency of Count* - The Team was very impressed with the openness and transparency of the counting process in Makeni. Citizens, party and candidate agents, observers were provided access and a clear view of the entire process.

- **Level Playing Field** - Although the District was generally peaceful, there were questions around access and the ability of other political parties to campaign in the District. The Team noted that the District and especially Makeni City appeared to be an APC stronghold as the incumbent President was from Makeni.

Karene District

- *Infrastructure for Polling*: Many of polling stations visited were set up under trees, in courtyards, and in open areas, which made them subject to the elements such as rain and heavy winds which meant delays to the process.
- *Training of NEC Officials*: NEC Officials were found to be very well informed but they faced challenges in terms of organising voters at the polling stations.
- *Security*: The presence of security officials was not consistent throughout the polling stations observed. For instance, at one station there were several security personnel while at another there were none.
- *Counting and Tallying Procedures*: The counting and tallying procedures were cumbersome and could be simplified to save time and resources. At many polling stations the counting occurred late into the night, which was a challenge for the observation.

Kenema District

- *Exemplary Performance* - The Team noted and commended the polling officials especially the polling centre managers and presiding officers for not only the efficient way in which they managed the voting process but also the informative manner in which they communicated the various steps of the process to voters, party & candidate agents and observers. The Team was convinced that these officials had been well trained and understood fully their roles and responsibilities.
- *Observers and Party Agents* - The visibility of and the diligence with which citizen observers, party agent and candidate representatives conducted themselves was also notable in the District.
- *Political Tensions* - Given the polarisation of politics in Kenema, fuelled long lasting rivalries between the leadership of the main political parties, some of which manifested itself through violent incidents during the campaign period. The Team was pleased to observe the 'All-Parties Peace March' held in Kenema city on March 6, the day before polls. It was uplifting and encouraging to see members of different parties marching together for a peaceful process.
- *Youth Participation* - The Team was very impressed by the number of young people involved in the process as voters, polling officials, party and candidate agents, and citizen observers. What the Team observed provides a basis for hope and optimism about the commitment of this youthful, next generation of Sierra Leoneans to democratic processes such as elections -- a foundation for further democratic consolidation in this post- conflict country.
- *Patience of Voters* - Upon arrival at their first polling at 6:30am; even it was still dark, the Team noted that there was already a long line of voters, some of whom stated they arrived the station at 4:00 am. The patience of voters is certainly an indication of their commitment and attachment to the electoral process. This same

level of patience was observed as some voters and all party & candidate agents waited through the counting and tabulation of results.

Kono District

- The Team noted that where the polling centre was divided into polling stations based on an alphabetical split of the register, queue controllers should have been more proactive in assisting voters to identify their correct polling station.
- The return of material process to the office of the National Electoral Commission in Koidu was chaotic. We observed, on two separate visits to the NEC on March 8th that seals on tamper-proof envelopes had been broken and no senior NEC officials were at their post. We also found that the receipt of sensitive election materials was not being recorded.
- No provision had been made for inclement weather at outdoor polling centres. Torrential rain delayed the counting and reduced the efficacy of what had been, until then, a transparent process.
- Police officers armed with AK47s were present at the first polling centre we visited, and had been there well before the centre opened.
- While large numbers of polling staff were women, there were few in the role of presiding officer, a position occupied mostly by young men.

Moyamba District

- The environment was generally calm. However, the Team was informed about pockets of violence in some parts of the District.
- On polling day, some polling stations opened on time while others opened after the scheduled time. Although in other instances the materials arrived late, this did not deter the voters from waiting patiently and without any incident. The queues were orderly and the environment was peaceful.
- The unique and interesting feature of the whole process was the high attendance of women and youth and their determination to vote.
- The process of voting went smoothly. While in some polling stations the queues were long, the polling officials performed their duties efficiently.

Port Loko District

- *Environment:* On the eve of the election, the Team observed some skirmishes between APC and SLPP supporters in the city centre. The matter was promptly quelled by the Police.
- *Organisation:* The organisation and distribution of the polling materials was orderly and well-coordinated. This was despite the fact that the District had received insufficient election materials. NEC officials were seen assisting voters requiring assistance to cast their votes. Presiding officers were generally professional in the discharge of their functions and responding to enquiries from Party Agents, voters and observers.

- *Voter turnout:* There was general optimism by the electorate as the turnout at each of the polling centre that the Team visited was huge and orderly. At one of the Polling Centres at the city centre, people started queuing as early as 5:30 am. Despite the initial challenges, voting commenced on time in most polling centres.
- *Movement:* Movement of voters was generally not impaired despite the vehicular ban in the city centres. However, the Team noticed that voters in the outskirts of the District walked a long distance to cast their votes. This was not seen as an impact of the vehicular ban but the sparsity of population of the particular area.

Tonkolili District

- The steadfastness of the NEC officials to meticulously comply with the spirit of the law and the electoral rules and regulations is commendable. This however, did not impede their recognition of the need to construct makeshift polling booths using any materials which were readily available
- The close proximity of the polling centres to the communities in both the rural and urban communities encouraged voter turnout.
- It appears that the limitations of the vehicular movement did not significantly impact the voter turnout.
- Businesses and vendors were all closed during the day which could have also contributed to the voter turnout.
- The strong community spirit was evident as the villagers prepared meals for the NEC officials and shared them at the polling centres.

Western Rural

- Polling began on time at most polling stations in the Western Rural Region, with all materials available. Party agents, international and domestic observers were in attendance at the opening of the polls. Polling stations were generally well laid out, to ensure the protection of the secrecy of the ballot.
- The composition of the electoral staff was balanced with men and women manning the polling stations. Some of the women were presiding officers in some of these polling stations.
- Some voters started queuing long before voting began at 7.00am. Queues were orderly and the environment was peaceful for the most part. The elderly, pregnant women, mothers with young children and persons with disabilities were given priority to vote. Young people and women turned up in numbers to join the queues.
- Identification of voters went smoothly, with the polling officers calling the name of the voter, their ID number and in some cases the page in which the name appears in the voters' register. However, in one instance a voter was turned away because she did not have a voter ID.
- Counting, screening and reconciliation of ballots at polling stations was generally conducted efficiently, with polling staff following the procedures.

Western Urban

- Election day began efficiently. The voting process was carried out swiftly and expeditiously. Polling officials were professional and gender diversity was observed. As a result, by mid-day there were very few queues at polling stations.
- Generally, voters turned out early and, by midday, it appeared that, at most polling stations, a large number of the registered electors had voted.
- Police officials were present in high numbers at polling stations. However, at some of the polling stations observed, the presence of armed police officials appeared to have an intimidating effect. At one polling station observed, a police officer appeared to be checking the identification documents of voters and ballot boxes. Polling officials did not seem empowered to challenge this.
- Party agents, candidate representatives, domestic and international observer groups were welcomed to the counting centres to observe the process. The atmosphere at counting stations was one of focussed quiet excitement. Counting officials adhered closely to the cumbersome regulations they had to follow. In conducting the count, counting officials were extremely methodical and diligent. The counting process was overall highly transparent.

Presidential Results - First Round

Candidate	Affiliation	Votes	Percentage
Mohamed Chernoh Bah	NDA	8,344	0.3
Julius Maada Bio	SLPP	1,097,482	43.3
Josephine Olufemi Claudius-Cole	UP	3,825	0.2
Kandeh Baba Conteh	PLP	4,233	0.2
Saa Henry Kabuta	UNPP	3,061	0.1
Samura Matthew Wilson Kamara	APC	1,082,748	42.7
Mohamed Kamarainba Mansaray	ADP	26,704	1.1
Charles Francis Margai	PMDC	9,864	0.4
Gbandi Jemba Ngobeh	RUFF	12,827	0.5
Samuel Sam-Sumana	C4C	87,720	3.5
Jonathan Patrick Sandy	NURP	2,318	0.1
Mohamed Sowa-Turay	UDM	5,695	0.2
Musa Tarawally	CDP	11,493	0.5
Beresford Victor Williams	ReNIP	2,555	0.1
Kandeh Kolleh Yumkella	NGC	174,014	6.9
Patrick John O'dwyer	NDP	4,239	0.2

Registered Voters:	3,178,663	
Total Valid Votes:	2,537,122	
Total Invalid Votes:	139,427	(5.49%)
Turnout:	2,676,549	(84.2%)

Recommendation

- Consideration should be given to the procedures for directing voters to their correct station. More training could be provided to the queue controllers or alternatives for guiding voters should be considered, including posting the voter's list under the corresponding station.
- Through written guidance and training the NEC can ensure that the procedures for receiving material post polling are consistently applied at all district offices.
- The NEC should continue to undertake civic education, particularly for older persons, new voters and marginalized groups.
- Without compromising the integrity and transparency of the process, NEC should consider ways and means to streamline and expedite the opening and closing processes.
- Where possible the NEC should ensure that all polling stations have adequate physical space as well as standard polling booths to ensure the secrecy of vote and security of the voter.
- NEC should ensure that all polling centres are clearly identified at the road side.

REPORT - SIERRA LEONE
RUN-OFF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION
31 MARCH 2018

Section 1

INTRODUCTION

The Commonwealth Observer Group continued to follow developments in Sierra Leone following the 7 March General Elections.

A seven-member team of observers, led by HE John Dramani Mahama, former President of Ghana, returned to Sierra Leone on 23 March, for the scheduled 27 March run-off election. The Group comprised:

- HE John Dramani Mahama - Chair
- Mr Julius Nkafu (Cameroon and United Kingdom)
- Ms Marla Morry (Canada)
- Ms Felleng Makeka (Lesotho)
- Hon Pelagie Uwera (Rwanda)
- Prof Mandla Mchunu (South Africa)
- Mr Harold Acemah (Uganda)

While in Freetown, the observers held meetings with a number of stakeholders, including the Electoral Commission, political parties, civil society, including women and youth groups, media representatives, the Office of National Security, the Police and the diplomatic community. In advance of the elections, Commonwealth observers were deployed to four provinces.

On 24 March, following court proceedings on matters related to the 7 March General Elections, the National Electoral Commission issued a statement, informing the public that the run-off elections could not take place as scheduled on 27 March. A new date of 31 March was announced.

Section 2

BACKGROUND TO 31 MARCH RUN-OFF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

On 13 March, the National Electoral Commission announced and certified the final results of the 7 March Presidential elections. According to the Sierra Leone Constitution, for a presidential candidate to be successful they must secure not less than 55 per cent of the valid votes cast in the first round. If no candidate secures the majority, then the two candidates with the highest number of votes will go forward to a second election which must be held within 14 days of the announcement of the result of the previous election.

With the certification of the presidential results, the Electoral Commission also announced the date of the run-off presidential election which was scheduled for 27 March. The period leading to the run-off presidential election was marred by uncertainties and complex legal challenges.

Citizenship Legal Challenge

As noted in Chapter Two, the case against NGC's presidential candidate, Kandeh Yumkella on grounds that he did not fulfill the candidate eligibility requirements and alleging that he held dual citizenship was still pending after the March 7 election day. Yumkella won a parliamentary seat but did not progress to the second round presidential elections. Although

the NGC did not progress to the second round of elections, the withdrawal of the case was linked by some members of the public to the likely horse-trading between the major political parties ahead of the run-off presidential election. However, the NGC publicly stated its neutrality with respect to the run-off.

The other case that was still pending ahead of the run-off presidential election involved the APC Presidential candidate Samura Kamara. As noted in Chapter Two, this case was lodged at the Supreme Court after the deadline for challenging candidate nominations. The case was still pending at the time of the writing of this report.

Allegations of irregularities in the conduct of 7 March Elections

After the 7 March elections, while the tallying process was underway five political parties namely: APC; SLPP; NGC; C4C and PMDC sent letters to the NEC outlining allegations of a range of irregularities in the election day process. Based on the allegations, the NGC and SLPP requested recounts in a number of polling stations. The C4C alleged widespread fraud in the elections and requested the NEC to invalidate all of the elections and to hold repeat elections. The APC requested an entire recount of the elections claiming massive rigging and electoral malpractices. In response to these letters the NEC granted requests for recounts of specific polling stations with more than 150 recounted, most based on the requests. The NEC did not grant the APC's request for an entire recount or the C4C's request to invalidate the elections. Apart from the recounts, the NEC invalidated more than 200 polling station results due to "overvoting" (meaning more ballots in the box than registered voters at the station). By law even one extra ballot in the box results in an invalidation of that polling station. It was speculated that the "overvoting" cases were likely the result of irregular voting procedures which required the polling staff and security officials to vote in the last polling station at every polling centre.

In addition, following the first round the NEC issued procedures to supplement its tally procedures manual adopted prior to the first round to address some outstanding issues from the first round in the results management system. Based on discussions with the two contesting parties the NEC invited the parties and observers to a "tour" of the results management system to ensure transparency and clarify outstanding issues.

The COG considered the NEC's response to these concerns to have been reasonable. Nevertheless, the pervasive allegations put forward by some parties fostered a level of public discourse that the first round elections were rigged undermining the credibility of what had been largely seen by domestic and international observers as a credible electoral process.

The Relations Between the NEC and Sierra Leone Police

Following the first round the police announced that it was investigating more than 200 cases of electoral offences committed on election day. Of those cases some NEC officials were being investigated for electoral malfeasance including the NEC's Executive Secretary. On March 21 the police demanded that the NEC release the Executive Secretary so that he could be interrogated. Some NEC assets were reportedly confiscated in regional offices. In response to the police initiating its investigation against NEC staff for electoral offences in the first round the NEC issued a public statement on the matter, alleging intimidation by police. The NEC's statement was followed by the Police statement refuting the allegations and justifying police actions. This created tensions between the NEC and police. While the police are the proper authority for investigating election crimes including those committed by NEC officials there was concern about the neutrality of the police.

Postponement of the 27 March Run-off Presidential Elections

On 20 March, a private citizen filed an Originating Notice of Motion with the High Court alleging widespread fraud in the 7 March elections and requested a forensic audit of the entire electoral process. The Motion also requested that the Court orders the Electoral Commission to implement a number of safeguards in the results management process. In addition, the applicant requested an injunction preventing the Commission from conducting the 27 March Run-Off until the substance of the case was finalised.

On Saturday, 24 March, the High Court of Sierra Leone issued an interim injunction against the conduct of the Run-Off Presidential election, scheduled for 27 March. In an acknowledgement of the court case, the NEC issued a statement the morning of 24 March informing the public that while legal proceedings were ongoing, it would continue its practical and logistical preparations for the run-off election. Later in the afternoon of the 24 March, the Commission issued another statement informing the public that it had received official notice of the interim injunction against the conduct of the run-off presidential election. The NEC noted that it would temporarily cease all logistical preparations for the run-off.

On Monday, 26 March, without deciding on the substance of the claims, the High Court vacated the interim injunction but issued orders guiding the conduct of the run-off election. Subsequently, the Electoral Commission issued a statement informing the public about the resumption of election preparations. It also notified the public that due to the logistical delays it would no longer be able to hold elections on 27 March but sought a new date of 31 March. The Supreme Court affirmed the new date of 31 March 2018 as provided by the NEC.

Election violence

In the lead up to the run-off there were reports of the increased use of divisive language by several stakeholders and calls for mobilisation around ethnic lines. The COG was also informed of the use of hate speech and more localised incidents of politically-motivated violence. Some teams observed these isolated cases of violence in the areas where they were deployed. In his interim statement, the Chair of the COG expressed the Group's disappointment at this worrying development and urged the Sierra Leoneans to place the stability and peace of the country above all other considerations.

Section 3

VOTING COUNTING AND RESULTS TABULATION

On Saturday, 31 March, the run-off election between the two leading candidates from the 7 March presidential election were held. Polling was scheduled from 07.00 to 17.00 and organised in 3300 Polling Centres which were sub-divided into 11,222 Polling Stations. Polling stations were within public facilities such as schools, churches, community centres, as well as open spaces.

Assessment of the Opening and Voting

Commonwealth Observers were deployed in three provinces and Freetown to witness the process. Observers reported a largely peaceful, transparent and credible process. Voters turned out in large numbers and were free to exercise their right to vote. The Observer Group again commends polling officials for their professionalism and methodical approach to ensuring a credible process. Party agents of both candidates were visible and well-represented throughout the country as were citizen and international observers.

Key observations of Commonwealth teams included:

- All stations observed opened on time, voters were free to exercise their right to vote and generally the secrecy of the vote was ensured.
- Observers reported that polling officials were professional, helpful and focused on their task.
- Observers noted the participation of the elderly and disabled voters, and were encouraged by the presence of women and youth both as voters, polling officials and citizen observers.
- The Voter Register appeared to be accurate and robust. Fears expressed by some regarding inaccuracies with the register seem to be allayed, based on the low incidence of election day complaints.
- The presence of the police and heavily armed military personnel at the various polling centres and their active participation in the polling process including queue control at some centres. Their presence improved security but appeared to be intrusive and intimidating to some voters.

Assessment of the Counting and Results Tabulation

All polling stations observed closed on time in accordance with procedures and the counting of votes at the stations was transparent and orderly. The party agents of the two candidates, as well as citizen and international observers were present

Key observations of Commonwealth teams included:

- All polling stations observed closed on time, with polling officials largely following procedures.
- There appeared to be a noticeable increase in the number of party agents and citizen observers.
- It was noted that in some of the stations observed polling officials were not as familiar or aware of the new procedures adopted by the Electoral Commission. Therefore, while it did not appear deliberate, inconsistencies in the application of procedures was noted.

- The count at polling stations was conducted in a smooth and transparent manner, with polling officials working diligently and methodically in the presence of party agents, citizen and international observers.
- Commonwealth Observers commended the people of Sierra Leone for the spirit in which they participated in this election despite the delays and uncertainty.

The Results: Run Off

Candidate	Affiliation	Votes	Percentage
Samura Matthew Wilson Kamara	APC	1,227,171	48.19
Julius Maada Bio	SLPP	1,319,406	51.81

Registered Voters:	3,178,663		
Total Valid Votes:	2,546,577		
Total Invalid Votes:	31,694	(1.24%)	
Turnout:	2,578,271	(81.11 %)	

ANNEX I: Biographies of Chairperson and Observers

HE John Dramani Mahama

HE John Dramani Mahama was the 4th President of the Fourth Republic of Ghana. He was popularly elected for a four-year term (January 07 2013 - January 06 2017) on December 07, 2012. President Mahama had previously served as Vice President of the Republic of Ghana under the late President John Evans Atta Mills. He took over the reins of Government on the passing of President Mills on July 24, 2012, and assumed the role of Head of State, Head of Government and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. The President first contested to serve as a Member of Parliament for the Bole-Bamboi Constituency in 1996, and won on the ticket of the National Democratic Congress (NDC). He was re-elected to Parliament two more times in the year 2000, and 2004 prior to becoming the Vice-Presidential Candidate for the Party in 2008. During his first term of Office as an MP he was appointed Deputy Minister of Communications, and subsequently appointed substantive Minister.

Apart from a love of reading and acquiring knowledge, President Mahama also has a keen interest in Technology and being a farmer himself, in Agriculture. He is particularly interested in finding the most effective ways to improve agricultural productivity and works to encourage more young people to see farming as a viable business and not a subsistence activity. He also has keen interests in the opportunities for simplifying and making tasks easier with the use of Information and Communications Technology, and considers the ICT industry one of the sectors that can play a significant role in economic transformation and job creation.

Mr Paul Dacey (Australia)

Mr Paul Dacey was a career Public Servant in Australia for over 40 years. He spent the last 28 years of his public sector career in senior positions in the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) and held the post of Deputy Electoral Commissioner from 2000 until his retirement in December 2011. Mr Dacey has served on many overseas electoral missions, including South Africa, Indonesia, East Timor, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Fiji and Thailand. He has presented papers and facilitated discussions for the Commonwealth and the United Nations on numerous occasions, including at workshops and conferences focusing on electoral management. In 2006/7, Mr Dacey held the office of Vice Chair for the International Mission for Iraqi Elections. In 2012 he was a member of the Commonwealth Observer Group for the Sierra Leone general and local elections.

Dr Jeannine Comma (Barbados)

Dr Jeannine Comma is the former Chief Executive Officer and Director of the Sagcor Cave Hill School of Business and Management/University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus. Dr Comma has wide-ranging experience in both the private and public sector in the areas Organisational Development, Strategic Planning and Implementation, Leadership Development (with significant emphasis on Women in Leadership) and Corporate Governance. She has led initiatives on Parliamentary Oversight in Small States for the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago; Ethics and Integrity for Nascent Businesses through the IIC/InterAmerican Development Bank. Conducted research and presented papers on Women in Leadership for the Commonwealth Secretariat at workshops held in Nairobi and UN, New York. Developed Leadership and Transformation Management interventions for the Cabinet of St. Lucia as well as Ministries of Government in several Caribbean countries.

Ms Alice Mogwe (Botswana)

Ms Alice Mogwe has over twenty years' experience in project management, fundraising, and as a convener between civil society organisations, Government and public institutions and

donors. She has also been active in the field of Human Rights promotion internationally through conferences and international trainings. Her professional focus is on civic space, civil society engagement and governance as well as the role of civil society in Botswana and in Southern Africa. In 2015, she was a facilitator for the Commonwealth's Africa Workshop for Junior Professionals. She was also a Mission Leader of the civil society Botswana Election Support Network (BESNet) comprising 8 civil society organisations in the 2009 General Elections and an Observer in the 2014 General Election.

Dr Chris Fomunyoh (Cameroon)

Dr Chris Fomunyoh is a Senior Associate and Regional Director for Central and West Africa at National Democratic Institute. In the past two decades, he has organized international election observation missions, and supervised country specific democracy support programs with civic organizations, political parties and legislative bodies in many African countries. Dr Fomunyoh is an adjunct faculty at the Africa Centre for Strategic Studies and an adjunct professor of African Politics and Government at Georgetown University. Dr Fomunyoh holds a Licence en Droit from Yaoundé University in Cameroon, an LL.M. in International Law from Harvard Law School, and a Ph.D. in Political Science from Boston University.

Mr Julius Nkafu FCI Arb (Cameroon and United Kingdom)

Mr Julius Nkafu is a practising Barrister in both the UK and Cameroon, specialising in Litigation and Alternative Dispute Resolution. Previous roles included: Solicitor, Teacher, Councillor for London Borough of Hackney (2002 - 2014); Labour cabinet member responsible for Crime and Community Safety and Engagement; and one of the founding member of 'Team Hackney,' Hackney's local strategic partnership. Mr Nkafu is the founder of 'Africans for Labour' promoting greater policy understanding and mutually beneficial activities between the Labour party and Africans both in the UK and on the continent. He is involved in a number of community initiatives including pro-bono advisory work and addressing social inequalities such as the disproportionately high level of young black boys in the criminal justice system, and also unemployment and under employment within this group. Mr Nkafu is also a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators.

Ms Marla Morry (Canada)

Ms Marla Morry is an international lawyer and electoral expert with extensive experience in the fields of democratic elections, good governance, rule of law, and access to justice. In various capacities, she has worked with the UNDP, UNHCR, OSCE, EU, NATO and international and local NGOs in West Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the Caucasus, South Asia, and South Pacific. She has worked in emerging democracies and post-conflicts countries, and often in politically-sensitive environments. Ms Morry holds a Juris Doctor (focus on International Law and Public Law) and a Bachelor of Commerce from the University of Manitoba.

Mr Manuj Bhardwaj (India)

Mr Manuj Bhardwaj is a young international lawyer and holds a B.A. LL.B degree from Lloyd Law College (CCS University) India. He is currently pursuing an MSc in Public Policy & Human Development with specialisation in Foreign Policy & Development from United Nations University - MERIT in The Netherlands. Until recently he was working as a Research Associate with a legal think tank based in New Delhi and was practising at The High Court of Delhi in the areas of Indian Constitutional Law, IPR, Cyber laws, Data Privacy and International Arbitration. He is the Founder & Managing Partner of BSM Legal Advisors & Strategy Consultants LLP which is an international legal advisory, strategy & management solutions firm. He also holds the position of Indian Representative of the Commonwealth Youth Human Rights & Democracy Network (Youth Division) at The Commonwealth. Mr Bhardwaj has been instrumental in promoting the United Nations' campaign "Not Too Young To Run" in India which aims at advocating for the rights of young people running for elected office and to

reduce the age limit for running for elected office. In 2016, he was awarded the Youth Icon of India Award and Best Youth Entrepreneur in 2015.

Ms Marjorie Walla (Kenya)

Ms Marjorie Walla has over 20 years of extensive experience working with state and non-state institutions on governance issues. Her specialization is in elections, democracy and governance, strategic planning, capacity strengthening and training. She has worked with several organizations - governmental, non-governmental and regional peacekeeping forces. Ms Walla is currently based in Somalia, providing ongoing technical advice and support to electoral mandated state institutions and civil society organizations.

Ms Felleng Makeka (Lesotho)

Ms Felleng Makeka is an Economist by profession. In 1978 she was employed as an Economist at the Lesotho National Development Corporation (LNDC) to be promoted later to be Manager of the Newly established Lesotho Investment Promotion Centre. It was during this period that Lesotho became the second biggest exporter of knitwear to the United States with the assistance of AGOA. Throughout her career Mrs Makeka was an active politician and supporter of the Basotho National Party (BNP). She is a gender equality activist and a great proponent of the promotion of the rights of the girl child. She sits on the Board of Queens National Trust Fund as vice Chairperson. She is also the co-founder and the Public Relations Officer of the largest movement of organized business women in Lesotho, the Lesotho Federation of Women's Entrepreneurs (FLWE). Mrs Makeka has been High Commissioner of the Kingdom of Lesotho to the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland. She continues to be a vocal politician advocating for more economic and political empowerment of women. She has four children and four grandchildren.

Advocate John Walters (Namibia)

Adv John Walters obtained the degrees BA (1977) and LLB (1980) from the University of the Western Cape and was admitted as advocate of the Supreme Court of South Africa in 1981. He worked as a public prosecutor, magistrate, and attorney and acted as Prosecutor-General before being appointed as Ombudsman of the Republic of Namibia in July 2004. He has served on various boards and is a Steering Committee Member of the Network of African National Human Rights Institution (NANHRI). He was also the President of the International Ombudsman Institute (IOI) from 2014 - 2016.

Hon Maryan Street (New Zealand)

Maryan Street is a former Member of the New Zealand Parliament and a former Cabinet Minister in the New Zealand Government. She has been a teacher, a trade union official and an academic and is currently an industrial relations practitioner. She has participated in Commonwealth Observer Groups on two previous occasions, both in Lesotho. She has also worked on a UNDP project on power-sharing with Members of Parliament in Ethiopia.

Ms Idayat Hassan (Nigeria)

Ms Idayat Hassan is the Director of the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), an Abuja-based policy, advocacy and research organization with a focus on deepening democracy and development in West Africa. A lawyer by profession, Ms Hassan core interest in Development work spans Democracy, Peace and Security, and Transitional Justice in West Africa.

Dr Eric Kwa (Papua New Guinea)

Dr Eric Kwa is currently the Secretary and Chief Executive Officer of the Papua New Guinea Constitutional and Law Reform Commission, a position he has held since 2011. Dr Kwa is playing a pivotal role in reforming the Constitution and the laws of Papua New Guinea, many of which date back to the country's colonial era. Dr Kwa was formerly a Professor of Law at

the University of Papua New Guinea and a former Dean of the Law School. Dr Kwa holds a PhD in Environmental Law from the Auckland University, New Zealand. He also has a Master of Laws with Honours (LLM (Hon)) in Environmental Law from Wollongong University, Australia and Law Degree with Honours (LLB (Hon)) from the University of Papua New Guinea. In recognition for his efforts in supporting and promoting the women of Papua New Guinea, the Government of Papua New Guinea awarded him the Schola Kaskas Award in 2015.

Hon Pelagie Uwera (Rwanda)

Ms Pelagie Uwera has been a Commissioner in the National Electoral Commission of Rwanda since 2012. She holds a Licence in social Sciences and Master's degree in Development Studies from Kigali Independent University(ULK). She is an accredited Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Election(BRIDGE) full Facilitator on election management. In addition, she has vast experiences in research, data collection and analysis. Ms Uwera has participated in Commonwealth Observation missions in Botswana.

Ms Charmain Naidoo (South Africa)

Ms Charmain Naidoo has been a South African print journalist for 35 years, most of that time spent writing for Africa's highest circulation Sunday newspaper, The Sunday Times. Ms Naidoo was the paper's foreign correspondent in London (1991-1993) and New York (1998-2001). Following her stint abroad, she returned to edit first The Weekend Post, a Port Elizabeth, South Africa, coastal weekend paper, and that province's daily newspaper, The Herald. She currently consults as a media strategist. She is also a political columnist for an online publication.

Prof Mandla Mchunu (South Africa)

Prof Mandla Mchunu is a lawyer by training. He obtained his LLM degree from Bristol University in England. He lectured at the Universities of the North (now called University of Limpopo) and Natal (now called University of KwaZulu-Natal) and was a guest professor at the University of Illinois in Chicago, USA. He has held positions of Director for the Centre for Socio-Legal Studies (CSLS); First Deputy Secretary of the Adjudication Secretariat for the Mandela election (1994); Deputy Director-General for the Department of Constitutional Development (1996); Chief Electoral Officer of the Independent Electoral Commission (1997); Director-General for the Provincial Government of KwaZulu-Natal (2006); and Commission Secretary for the Presidential Remuneration Commission (2013). In the private sector Prof. Mchunu has held positions of Chairman and Deputy Chairman for Eyesizwe Coal Ltd. and SAAB Grintek Defence Ltd., respectively. He is currently the Executive Chairman of the AfriCore Group, which consults and specialises in electoral democracy, focusing on the professional delivery of elections in Africa, in the public and private sectors.

Mr Harold Acemah (Uganda)

Mr Harold Acemah is a retired Ambassador of Uganda who served for over 30 years in various capacities. Ambassador Acemah represented Uganda in many stations including Ethiopia, Canada, USA and Belgium. He is currently a Consultant specialising in international affairs and a Columnist with the SUNDAY MONITOR newspaper of Uganda. Ambassador Acemah is a Political Scientist by profession and obtained a BA (Hons) degree from Makerere University, Kampala and MA from the University of Toronto, Canada. In 1987 Ambassador Acemah was a Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies of the University of Oxford. Mr Acemah is married with five children.

**ANNEX II: Deployment Plan
General Elections - 7 March 2018**

NO.	PROVINCES	DISTRICTS	TEAMS
1	Western Area	Western Area Urban <i>City: Freetown</i>	President John Dramani Mahama (Chair) Clara Cole Yvonne Chin
2	Western Area	Western Area Rural <i>City: Waterloo</i>	Lindiwe Maleleka Zippy Ojago
3	Northern	Bombali <i>City: Makeni</i>	Eric Kwa (Papua New Guinea) Harold Achemah (Uganda)
4	Northern	Tonkolili <i>City: Magburaka</i>	Jeannine Comma (Barbados) John Walters (Namibia)
5	North Western	Karene <i>City: Karene</i>	Idayat Hassan (Nigeria) Manuj Bhardwaj (India)
6	North Western	Port Loko <i>City: Port Loko</i>	Marjorie Walla (Kenya) Shadrach Haruna
7	Southern	Bo <i>City: Bo</i>	Maryan Street (New Zealand) Alice Mogwe (Botswana)
8	Southern	Moyamba <i>City: Moyamba</i>	Ryan Bertrand Felleng Makeka (Lesotho)
9	Eastern	Kono <i>City: Koidu</i>	Charmain Naidoo (South Africa) Paul Dacey (Australia)
10	Eastern	Kenema <i>City: Kenema</i>	Chris Fomunyoh (Cameroon) Pelagie Uwera (Rwanda)

ANNEX III: Joint Communiqué



COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT THE PRE-ELECTION MEETING OF HEADS OF INTERNATIONAL OBSERVER MISSIONS TO THE 7 MARCH 2018 ELECTIONS IN SIERRA LEONE

The following international election observation missions (IEOMs) present in Sierra Leone: Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), African Union (AU), The Commonwealth, Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA), European Union (EU), and The Carter Center (TCC).

Recognise that the 2018 elections in Sierra Leone, the fourth since the end of the civil war, are critical to the maintenance of peace and stability in the country. Based on consultations with Sierra Leonean stakeholders over the past weeks, have noted the efforts of the National Electoral Commission, the Political Parties Registration Commission, the Judiciary, the Office of National Security, the Sierra Leone Police, civil society, the media and other key institutions towards the conduct of peaceful and transparent elections.

Call on the political leaders, parties and their supporters to ensure peaceful elections and respect for the rule of law as they go to the polls tomorrow and through the results tallying process. Further urge them to uphold their commitments under the 'Freetown Declaration', which was signed by presidential candidates on 28 February 2018.

Further call on the NEC and party polling agents to conduct their duties in a professional manner, which would ensure that these elections are transparent, credible and conducted in accordance with prescribed laws and regulations.

Encourage candidates to accept the outcome of the elections in line with Article 9 of the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001) and, in the event of complaints or disputes, encourage candidates to seek redress through legal channels whilst at all times refraining from acts of violence and intimidation.

Look to the government of Sierra Leone to uphold its constitutional obligations to provide a secure environment that guarantees the safety of candidates, voters, NEC officials and electoral materials. The missions

urge the security agencies throughout the country to demonstrate professionalism and to enforce the law in a neutral and proportional manner.

The different IEOMs have deployed over 250 international observers across the country to follow all aspects of election day and some will remain to observe the tallying process and post-election period.

The IEOMs present in Sierra Leone would like to take the opportunity to wish the citizens of Sierra Leone well in the exercise of their democratic rights; and pledge our unequivocal commitment to support the people of Sierra Leone to ensure a peaceful and credible conclusion of the electoral process.

6 March 2018

Freetown, Sierra Leone

ANNEX IV: Interim Statement: General Elections - 7 March 2018



SIERRA LEONE GENERAL ELECTIONS 2018: COMMONWEALTH OBSERVER GROUP INTERIM STATEMENT *07 March 2018*

Statement by: HE John Dramani Mahama, Chair of the
Commonwealth Observer Group to Sierra Leone

This is the Interim Statement of the Commonwealth Observer Group, and it is issued with the results process yet to be formally completed.

The Commonwealth Observer Group commends the people of Sierra Leone for the peaceful and orderly manner they went about the voting process on 7 March 2018.

The Group has been present in Sierra Leone since 28th February. Ahead of Election Day, we met with a broad range of stakeholders to gain a comprehensive picture of the electoral processes and environment. We met with the National Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone (NEC), political parties, civil society, including women and youth groups, media representatives, the Office of National Security, Commonwealth High Commissioners and other national and international election observer missions.

On 5 March, our teams were deployed throughout the five provinces of Sierra Leone to observe the election preparations and the voting, counting and results process on Election Day. In the provinces, our teams also met electoral officials, political parties and the police at the district level to gain a more complete picture of the process and environment. Commonwealth teams also observed the final campaign events around the country.

Our observers reported that these elections were inclusive. We witnessed the participation of the elderly and disabled voters, and were encouraged by the presence of women and youth both as voters and officials. This participatory approach augurs well for Sierra Leone's democracy and development.

It is the Commonwealth's hope and expectation that the spirit of orderliness and peace, which has characterised the voting process, will prevail as we enter into the results phase.

The electoral environment on Election Day was conducive to the free exercise of the people's franchise and basic freedoms were respected.

The following is our initial assessment of the critical aspects of the election process and the electoral environment. Our final report, which we will complete before our departure, will be issued at a later date.

KEY FINDINGS

PRE-ELECTION ENVIRONMENT

With the emergence of some new political parties and candidates, the election campaigns were competitive and fiercely contested. Upon our arrival in Freetown, we were able to observe a few of the final political party rallies with supporters openly clad in party colours and campaign paraphernalia including billboards and posters highly visible. Many of the rallies observed occurred without incident. Following deployment, our teams also observed final rallies in some of the provinces where they were deployed.

However, during our briefings with a number of stakeholders, we were informed of some localised incidents of politically-motivated violence in the run-up to these elections.

Several stakeholders expressed anxiety about the abuse of incumbency, which could include the use of public resources, such as government vehicles and officials in support of the ruling party candidate.

A significant number of stakeholders also expressed concern about the independence, professionalism and capacity of the Sierra Leone Police to carry out their duties in a non-partisan manner. Several incidents were highlighted to illustrate this concern, many of which revolved around the disproportionate or inadequate responses to incidents.

However, it was also noted that several national and international stakeholders had been working to support and strengthen the capacity of the Police through trainings and capacity building programmes.

The Commonwealth Observer Group commends the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC) for facilitating the signing of the Freetown Declaration, which I had the honour of presiding over.

We commend also the Presidential Candidates, their Running Mates and Political Parties for committing themselves to a peaceful process ahead of Election Day.

Our observers were therefore keen to see how some of these significant pre-election issues might impact the polls. Let me comment on some of these issues.

MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

Most stakeholders expressed the view that the media in Sierra Leone is polarised, with outlets demonstrating a clear bias towards particular presidential candidates and parties.

It is the impression of the Team that both public and private media outlets in Sierra Leone allotted time and space to political candidates in a generally unbalanced manner.

The Group notes that the Public Elections Act 2012; requires that during the election campaign period, the national public radio and television stations are to provide equal airtime to each candidate and each political party.

Although there are more independent media outlets, the enforcement of this provision needs to be strengthened.

The Group further notes the existence of criminal libel on Sierra Leone's statutes and wishes to point out a general movement in most of the Commonwealth towards a system of peer and other systems of regulation.

ELECTORAL FRAMEWORK AND ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

The general elections of 7th March elections are the fourth multi-party elections to be held in Sierra Leone, since the end of the decade-long civil war in 2002. Significantly, it is the first elections to be managed entirely by national authorities following the departure of the United Nations mission in 2014.

The electoral framework provides the basic conditions for credible and competitive elections, with the requisite freedoms. Within this context, the competent management and administration of Election Day represents further progress for this country in the consolidation of its democracy.

The National Electoral Commission is the election management body responsible for the registration of eligible voters and the conduct of elections and referendums. For these elections, there was significant confidence in the independence and integrity of the institution and its processes. We commend the National Electoral Commission, and polling officials on duty for their professionalism and commitment exhibited on Election Day.

THE VOTING PROCESS

On Election Day, our observers reported that most polling stations opened on time with a few exceptions. The delays observed did not appear deliberate but seemed to be as a result of logistical challenges or misunderstanding of regulations.

For instance, the polling station where I personally observed the opening of poll was delayed by approximately 30 minutes because polling officials only began the opening procedures at 7:00am.

At the opening of the polls, NEC officials largely followed the opening procedures and voting generally proceeded in an atmosphere of calm and orderliness, even if slow in some instances.

Generally, the layout of the polling stations was conducive to orderly voting. However, it was noted that some of the classrooms and polling tents, were too small to accommodate some of the initially large queues in an orderly manner.

Like other Observers, we were struck by the long queues in some polling stations. However, it seemed that the initiative by the Elections Commission to limit the Register at each polling station to 300 helped with the processing of voters.

We note the NEC's attempt to simplify the complicated process of voting in four different elections by using colour coded boxes and corresponding ballot papers. We observed that the polling officials responsible for guiding voters to place their ballots in the correct boxes played a critical role in facilitating this process.

We commend the contributions made to the process by party agents, as well as citizen observers and monitors, most of whom were young people. Party agents we met observed the rules of the polling station; were friendly and cooperated among themselves.

They frequently assisted the polling officials to find names in the register, and engaged constructively when a problem arose.

In summary, we wish to highlight the following positive trends that we observed on polling day:

- An encouraging turn-out
- A largely peaceful process
- A robust voter register
- Electoral processes were largely followed
- There was a very visible presence of party agents and citizen observers across the country, most of whom were young people
- An inclusive process with a balance of women and men playing their roles as voters and as polling officials. We further note that differently abled people as well as the elderly, mothers with young children, and pregnant women were assisted to vote.

We however note the following challenges during the voting process:

Queue Management at Polling Stations

We note that at some polling centres with multiple stations there was neither a queue controller nor a reference guide to assist voters with locating their exact station. This created some confusion amongst voters regarding the appropriate station and contributed to the slow pace of voting in some instances.

Vehicle Restriction on Election Day

We note the vehicle restriction and manned checkpoints instituted on Election Day. While it created a conducive security environment on the day, elections remain one of the most vibrant and participatory expression of citizens' democratic rights. While constructive, this measure could have disenfranchised some citizens and we therefore recommend that it should be reviewed for future elections.

The Sierra Leone Police

The presence of the police and in some cases heavily armed military personnel, to some voters appeared intrusive and intimidating. But the generally peaceful voting process is also a plus for the people of Sierra Leone and the security agencies.

However, the incident at Goderich, which resulted in tension between the Police and Sierra Leone Peoples' Party supporters, was an example of a post voting situation that could have been better handled.

The Police and military besieged one of the offices of the Sierra Leone Peoples Party for several hours over allegations of sophisticated IT equipment being used to hack the Electoral Commission's systems.

Although we were able to deescalate this situation, the disproportionate response coupled with the lack of trust in this institution remains of much concern, particularly as the process continues.

In advance of these elections, a joint communiqué with the Heads of other international election observation missions was issued. In this Communiqué we called for all participants in the electoral process to refrain from any acts or statements that could cause tension or intimidation, and adversely affect the peaceful and orderly conduct of the elections.

I reiterate our call to all Sierra Leoneans to allow the process to conclude in an atmosphere of peace, and urge all stakeholders to continue to conduct their duties in a professional manner and to use legal and lawful processes to address any electoral challenges.

CLOSING, COUNTING AND THE RESULTS PROCESS

At the close of polls at 5:00pm, our Observers reported that there were little or no voters in many of the polling stations, which previously had long queues. Those that were in the queue at the close of polls were allowed to vote as stipulated by law.

Our Teams followed the counting and tabulation at polling stations in a number of districts. The counting process was transparent, with invalid ballots being identified in a consultative manner among the polling officials and party agents. However, aspects of the process were inefficient and tedious.

We urge the NEC to explore ways of streamlining aspects of the counting process in future elections, while safeguarding accuracy and transparency. We further urge the Electoral Commission to provide adequate lighting to facilitate the counting process.

Our overall conclusion is that the voting, closing and counting process at the polling stations were credible and transparent. Our Teams further noted that where there were anomalies in the application of certain procedures, they were not of such gravity as to negatively impact the credibility of the closing and counting process. However, we are mindful that the tallying of results continues across the country.

CONCLUSIONS

Our observers reported that these elections were inclusive. We witnessed the participation of the elderly and disabled voters, and were encouraged by the presence of women and youth as voters and officials. This participatory approach augurs well for Sierra Leone's democracy and development.

However, we do note the decline and low representation of women contesting for high office. The team would recommend to Sierra Leone and other Commonwealth countries with such low representation of women in the political space to institute affirmative action such as the provision of voluntary or mandatory quotas, by the State or political parties to redress this under representation.

With women representing a little more than half of the population in Sierra Leone, the linkage between good governance and gender equality as a means of achieving sustainable democracy is quite clear.

Again, it is the Commonwealth's hope and expectation that the spirit of orderliness and peace, which has characterised the voting process, will prevail as we enter into the results phase.

The electoral environment on Election Day was conducive to the free exercise of the people's franchise and basic freedoms were respected.

We will provide recommendations on how the processes might be further improved in our final report.

Thank you.

Issued on 9th March 2018

ANNEX V: Deployment Plan: Run - off Presidential Elections - 31 March 2018

NO.	PROVINCES	DISTRICTS	TEAMS
1	Western Area	Western Area Urban <i>City: Freetown</i>	President Mahama (Chair) Clara Cole Yvonne Chin
2	Western Area	Western Area Rural <i>City: Waterloo</i>	Lindiwe Maleleka Zippy Ojago
3	Northern	Bombali <i>City: Makeni</i>	Harold Achema (Uganda) Marla Morry (Canada)
4	Southern	Bo <i>City: Bo</i>	Jeannine Comma (Barbados) Madonna Lynch
5	Eastern	Kono <i>City: Koidu</i>	Julius Nkafu (Cameroon) Pelagie Uwera (Rwanda)
6	Eastern	Kenema <i>City: Kenema</i>	Mandla Mchunu (South Africa) Felleng Makeka (Lesotho)

ANNEX VI: Interim Statement: Run - off Presidential Elections - 31 March 2018



SIERRA LEONE RUN-OFF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS 2018: COMMONWEALTH OBSERVER GROUP INTERIM STATEMENT *31 March 2018*

**Statement by: HE John Dramani Mahama, Chair of the
Commonwealth Observer Group to Sierra Leone**

This is the Interim Statement of the Commonwealth Observer Group, and it is issued with the results tallying and declaration process yet to be formally completed.

I am honoured to have been asked by the Commonwealth Secretary-General to return to Sierra Leone to lead this group of experienced citizens of the Commonwealth to observe the Run Off Presidential Elections. For these Elections, the Group has been present in Sierra Leone since 23 March.

The 31 March 2018 Run Off Presidential Election was an important step forward in the consolidation of Sierra Leone's democracy and development. Sierra Leoneans turned out to cast their votes, demonstrating their faith and commitment to democratic processes and institutions.

The Commonwealth Observer Group once again commends the people of Sierra Leone for their patience and commitment to exercise their franchise, which clearly reflects a genuine desire for a credible electoral process.

There was, however, a slow turnout in many places. Nonetheless, those who turned out to vote were peaceful while they waited to exercise their hard-earned right to vote.

Ahead of Election Day, we met with a broad range of stakeholders together with the other Observer Missions to gain a comprehensive picture of the electoral processes and environment.

We met with the National Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone (NEC), political parties, civil society, including women and youth groups, media representatives, the Office of National Security, the Police and the diplomatic community.

On 25 March, our teams were deployed in four of the five provinces of Sierra Leone to observe the election preparations and the voting, counting and results process on Election Day. In the provinces, our teams also met electoral officials, political parties and the police at the district level to gain a more complete picture of the process and environment.

It is the Commonwealth's hope and expectation that this spirit of patience, orderliness and peace, which has characterised the voting process, will prevail as we enter into the results tallying and declaration phase.

We urge all political parties, candidates and their supporters to respect the will of the people of Sierra Leone as it emerges over the next few days. We also urge all to refrain from making any utterances and/or performing acts that could exacerbate tensions and negatively affect the post-election environment.

Sierra Leone has committed itself to certain democratic values and principles contained in the national, regional, Commonwealth and International obligations it has chosen to subscribe to.

The following is our initial assessment of Election Day and the electoral environment. We will issue a comprehensive Final Report at a later stage, containing our conclusions on the entire process and recommendations for future elections.

Pre-Election Environment

According to Sierra Leone's Constitution, in order to be duly elected, a presidential candidate requires 55 per cent of valid votes cast. In the absence of the required majority, the two leading candidates go forward to a second round of voting no later than 14 days from the official declaration of results. No thresholds exist in the second round; whichever candidate gets the majority of votes cast is declared the winner.

The election contested on 31 March 2018 by the candidates of the two political parties that emerged ahead in the first round was originally scheduled and announced for 27 March 2018.

However, an interim injunction preventing the conduct of the election was issued by the High Court on Saturday, 24 March 2018. Although the injunction was subsequently vacated, orders guiding the conduct of the second round of the elections were issued.

Due to this delay, the Electoral Commission stated that it was no longer able to deliver the election on 27 March and therefore a new election date would be required. The Supreme Court affirmed the new date of 31 March 2018 as provided by the National Electoral Commission.

The acceptance of the outcome of an election invariably reflects the trust and confidence the citizenry has in the conduct and management of the process.

Therefore, we noted with some disappointment, during this pre-election period, a seemingly concerted effort to undermine the credibility of the National Electoral Commission. An independent and credible election management body that enjoys the confidence of all stakeholders is essential to the process.

Additionally, during this period, we were concerned to note the increased use of divisive language by several stakeholders and calls for mobilisation around ethnic lines. We were also informed of the use of hate speech and more localised incidents of politically-motivated violence. Within the context of Sierra Leone's recent past, this was a most worrying and disappointing development.

Elections are naturally a competitive process; there must be a winner and a loser. However, they are not an “end all” event. The will and interests of the people, as well as the stability and peace of the nation should always be paramount.

I can attest that there is life after politics!

KEY FINDINGS

Election Day

- On Election Day, as was reported during the 7 March General Elections, the 31 March Run Off Presidential Election was generally peaceful and inclusive. We witnessed the participation of the elderly and disabled voters, and were encouraged by the presence of women and youth both as voters and officials.
- We would like to commend the Electoral Commission for its professionalism, diligence and consistency in delivering another well-managed and credible process. Despite logistical and administrative challenges, the Commission was able to implement some new procedures and guidelines.
- On election day Commonwealth observers reported positively on the voting and counting processes in the many stations visited.
- The Voter Register appeared to be accurate and robust. Fears expressed by some regarding inaccuracies with the register seem to be allayed, based on the low incidence of election day complaints.
- Once again, we note the presence of the police and heavily armed military personnel at the various polling centres and their active participation in the polling process including queue control at some centres. Their presence improved security but appeared to be intrusive and intimidating to some voters.
- The Group recommends consideration of special arrangements for persons performing election related duties on polling day, such as polling officials and security officials, in order for them to be able to exercise their right to vote.
- The count at polling stations was conducted in a smooth and transparent manner, with polling officials working diligently and methodically in the presence of party agents, national and international observers.
- It is important to note that results tabulation is on-going, this is obviously a critical part of the process. If there be any disputes or challenges, redress should be sought using the prescribed channels. We remain hopeful that the full results will be available within a reasonable period.
- We continue to urge all Sierra Leoneans to be patient and act with a sense of responsibility to maintain public order and demonstrate their commitment to democratic processes and institutions.

- Finally, the Commonwealth Observer Group would like to commend the people of Sierra Leone for the spirit in which they participated in this election.

CONCLUSIONS

Once again, we are mindful that the tallying of results is continuing across the country.

We are pleased that the Presidential elections have now concluded after what has been a complicated and lengthy process. Commonwealth observers commend the voters for the patience they have shown throughout the election period and their continued determination to exercise their right to vote.

Our overall conclusion is that the voting, closing and counting process at the polling stations were credible and transparent. Our Teams further noted that where there were anomalies in the application of certain procedures, they were not of such gravity as to negatively impact the credibility of the closing and counting process.

The Group notes that the conclusion of the election provides an opportunity for stakeholders to move forward in a conciliatory manner and to build trust and confidence in their democratic institutions.

Once again it is the Commonwealth's hope and expectation that the spirit of orderliness and peace, which has characterised the voting process, will prevail as we enter into the results phase.

We will provide more detailed recommendations on how the processes might be further improved in our final report.

Thank you.

Issued on 2 April 2018

Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation

The Commonwealth Secretariat is a signatory to both the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and the associated Code of Conduct for International Election Observation Missions, which were commemorated on 27 October 2005 at the United Nations in New York.

Commonwealth Observer Groups are organised and conducted in accordance with the Declaration and Commonwealth Observers undertake their duties in accordance with the Code of Conduct.

Commonwealth Secretariat

Marlborough House, Pall Mall

London SW1Y 5HX

United Kingdom

thecommonwealth.org



The Commonwealth