



National Early Warning System (NEWS)

Situation Report on the Mitigation of Threats to the peaceful conduct of the 2018 General Elections in Sierra Leone

December 2017

Introduction

The December situation report focused on physical violence, conformity to the rule of law and hostile communication. Other incidents bordered on resignations and defection of various political actors from their parties to other parties to consolidate relevance and alliances in the lead up to the March 7 elections.

On December 7, 2017 the National Electoral Commission released series of notifications and timetables for the nomination of presidential and parliamentary candidates, Paramount Chiefs of Parliament, Mayors, District Chairpersons and Councilors as well as the various nomination centers across the Districts in line with the Public Election Act of 2012. The fourth parliament was also dissolved the same day with a valedictory address delivered at the Chamber of Parliament by President Ernest Koroma.

The Political Party Registration Commission (PPRC) concluded its formal issuance of certificates of registration to political parties with the presentations of certificates to Coalition for Change and the National Unity Reconciliation Party in line with Section 12(1) of the Political Parties Act of 2002. This brought the total number of registered parties for the March 7 2017 elections to 16. The commission also launched the revised Code of Conduct for political parties within the month.

NEC also concluded the distribution and collection of voter identity cards in the month.

The President also continued his “thank you” tour within the period amidst condemnation from opposition parties that the President and the ruling APC used the tour as campaigns for the March 7 elections.

The Current Election Security Threats in Sierra Leone

Physical Violence and Destruction of Properties:

- On 13th December 2017, supporters of the All People’s Congress Party (APC) reportedly accused supporters of the sacked Vice President, Chief Sam Sumana of tearing the banners of their flag bearer aspirant, Dr. Samura Kamara in Koidu City, Kono in Eastern region;
- On 18th December 18 2017, supporters of the Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP) reportedly accused the All People’s Congress Party (APC) supporters of tearing banner of their presidential candidate, retired Brigadier Julius Maada in Makeni City, northern region;
- On December 19, 2017, the posters of the flag bearer aspirant retired Brigadier Julius Maada Bio of the main opposition Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP) are reportedly destroyed by supporters of the ruling All People’s Congress Party (APC) at the cotton tree in Freetown, Western Urban District;
- On 21st December 2017, there was a violent confrontation between current Member of Parliament (MP) of the All People’s Congress and a councilor at Constituency 048 at Mile 91, Tonkolili. The disputing parties are contesting for the party symbol for parliamentary elections in the March 2018 election;
- On 24th December 2017, supporters of the Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP) accused supporters of the All People’s Congress Party (APC) of tearing the banner of their presidential candidate retired Brigadier Julius Maada Bio in Calaba town, Western Rural District.
- On 25th December 2017, there was a violent confrontation between members of the SLPP in Ward 022, in Constituency 007 Segbwema Njaluahun Chiefdom Kailahun District. During the violence, the Youth Chair was beaten and injured. Police had arrested four people and investigation is ongoing.

Conformity to the Rule of Law

- On 6th December 2017, the government applied to Parliament for a review and amendment of the Constitutional Provision geared towards the reduction in the threshold for election to the office of president from 55% of the valid votes cast to 50%. This generated an intense public debate with respect to the intention of the government to change the electoral rules three months to Presidential election;
- On 21st December 2017, Chenoh Alpha M. Bah, the Chairman of the African Socialist Movement (ASM) in the U.S. wrote an open letter to the Political Parties Registration Commission, accusing President Ernest Koroma and the leadership of APC of violating the Public Election Rules and Political Parties Code of Conduct by embarking on campaign tours in the Northern, Southern and Eastern regions of the Country in the guise of “Thank You Tours”. He stated that this was in violation of the Public Election Act of 2012 and Political Parties Act of 2002;
- On the 20 December 2017, stakeholders of constituency 34 ward 111 Masgong section of Paki Masabong chieftdom, in Bombali District prevented National Electoral Commission officials to commence the distribution of voters ID cards in their localities because of the claim that the chieftdom was not among the de-amalgamated chieftdoms. Despite the plea by NEC officials and other Senior stakeholders led by the Chieftdom Speaker, the people were still reluctant and warned that they are going to boycott all remaining elections related activities including voting on pulling day on 7th March 2018, if government fail to address their concerns.

Hostile Communication

- The Chairman of the All People’s Congress, Bo District, Mr. Sheikh Sillah have warned opposition parties and their supporters that the party will retaliate any attack or damage to their party properties;

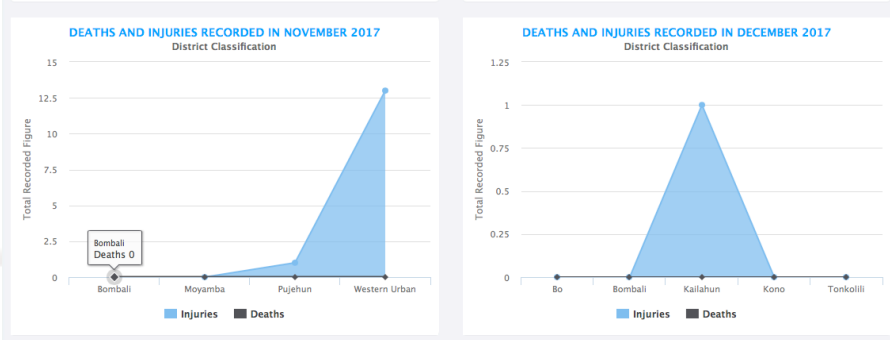
Statistical Overview of Electoral Threats

According to WANEP’s NEWS reports for December 2017, there were a total of 11 incident reports submitted. These incidents took place in six districts, namely Western Urban, Bombali,

Western Rural, Kailahun, Kono and Tonkolili especially cases related to physical violence, conformity to the rule of law and hostile communication.

In line with the NEWS indicators categories, Physical Violence recorded the highest frequency of incidents at 55%, conformity to the rule of law recorded 27% while hostile communication is 9%.

In comparative terms the month of December recorded a 22% higher percentage frequency of physical violence reports as compared to



November attributed to the increase of damage to party posters and billboards especially between the All People’s Congress and the Sierra Leone People’s Party. A trend analysis of high-risk districts from the reports indicates Western Urban and Bombali remains the highest risk district from the cumulative frequency of four months reports of September, October, November and December while Moyamba, Bo, Kono and Tonkolili highlight medium to high-risk districts from the available data for the four-month period. In terms of regional distribution, the Northern and Southern region highlight a higher frequency of incidents. However the cumulative incidents in Western urban raises the overall risk of the Western region within the four-month period.

Recommendations

To PPRC/NEC/NCD/CSOs:

- The National Commission for Democracy should work with the Political Parties Registration Commission, the National Electoral Commission and appropriate Civil Society Organizations should promote public sensitization and voters’ education and peace messages in various local languages across the districts especially in Urban Western, Bombali, Kono, Bo, Moyamba and Tonkolili;
- NERG and DERG should work with the National Electoral Commission to organize multi-stakeholder dialogues at district levels especially in high risk areas to strengthen intra and

inter party dispute resolution mechanisms to mitigate youth violence in the lead up to the elections;

To ONS/PROSEC/DISEC/CHISEC

- The Office of National Security should work with the Provincial, District and Chiefdom Security Committees and with relevant CSOs to implement appropriate security responses to identified threats of election related violence at all levels;
- The Chiefdom Security Committees should work with appropriate Community Based Organizations (CBOs) to organize town hall meetings on political tolerance and non violence which improves civil-security relations in the lead up to the elections;

To IMC/SLAJ

- The Independent Media Commission should partner with the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists should monitor and sanction respective media used as platform for disseminating hate speeches across the districts;

To Political Parties

- NEC and the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC) should strengthen the grievance procedures at the level of Political Party Liaison Committee. Capacity building is required to improve the Alternative Dispute Resolutions to better address the emerging intra and inter-party disputes at the national and district levels;