



National Early Warning System (NEWS) Situation Report on the Mitigation of Election Threats to the 2018 General Elections in Sierra Leone

August 2017

Introduction

Sierra Leone is preparing for another political transition with the scheduled 2018 general elections. Amidst post-Ebola recovery challenges, following a series of consultations with his cabinet and the Elections Management Bodies (EMBs), in compliance with the necessary constitutional provisions, President Dr. Ernest Bai Koroma, announced that the general elections are to be scheduled March 7, 2018. During this announcement, the President assured the nation and the international community of his Government's preparedness for conducting peaceful elections and a successful political transition. He reaffirmed his commitment to two terms in office as stipulated in Section 46(1) of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone¹.

The 2018 elections is significant for Sierra Leone's political transition since it's the first election to be conducted under the revised 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone, as well as the 2015 population census. In addition, it would also be the first elections to be conducted based on the restructured 16 political districts and 190 administrative chiefdoms, passed into law by the Sierra Leone Parliament on Tuesday 4th April 2017.

¹ The constitution states that no person shall hold office as president for more than two terms of five years each whether or not the terms are consecutive-<http://www.commonlii.org/sl/legis/const/1991/>

The Current Election Security Threats in Sierra Leone

² *Physical Violence and Destruction of Properties*

Trends of reported violent incidents in the media and through the WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS) suggest escalating intra and inter-party violence occurrences resulting in deaths, injuries and destruction of property. Reported cases include:

- On 30th May, 2016 a youth member of the Sierra Leone Peoples' Party was stabbed and killed³ by a rival supporter in Kenema, Eastern Sierra Leone, as the party's leaders met to reach an agreement on how to conduct lower level elections, a precursor to the National Delegates Conference.
- On July 9th, 2017, the Chairman and leader of ADP, Mohamed Kamariamba Mansaray, was allegedly attacked while his driver was stabbed on the face and his vehicle damaged during a bye-election in constituency 050 on July 9, 2017 in Lunsar.
- On July, 19th, 2016 joint police and military patrol forces had to intervene to restore order on the Island of Bonthe, Sierra Leone, where members of the male 'Poro'⁴ society clashed with the security forces. An argument between a female non-member and a male member flared up into violent confrontation, which left two people dead.⁵
- Violence was also reported during bye-elections in Constituency 050 in Port Loko District, Northern Sierra Leone, and Constituency 001 in Kailahun District, Eastern Sierra Leone. In Port Loko, youth members of the ADP attacked the Chairman of the Party, Mohammed Kamarainba Manasaray, as he campaigned in the constituency. At Kailahun, the military was deployed to support the police to restore order when SLPP and APC youths clashed during political rallies.
- The arrest and subsequent charge of an ADP leader for possession of a stunt gun which he claimed to have possessed for self defence during a local bye-election in Ward 089 on 24th April 2017, in Makeni and Ward 025 in Kailahun on May 28, 2017.
- On the 6th of August 2017, irate youths in Bumpe chiefdom, Bo District, Southern Sierra Leone attacked and injured a Member of Parliament. The matter was brought to court and the perpetrators have been jailed for this act for one night.

² <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=org.necsl.necapp>; WANEP NEWS Report

³ Karimu Peter George aka Daddy George was allegedly killed by Junior Fonnne. They belonged to rival factions of the opposition party

⁴ Poro society is a secret society for specifically males and mainly those from the Northern part of Sierra Leone.

⁵ See Concord Times newspaper of July 19, 2016

Conformity to the Rule of Law

The Voter Exhibition exercise commenced on the 22nd August 2017 for a period of one week to ensure registrants confirmation, corrections, inclusion, objection, rejection and re-registration critical to the credibility and integrity of the Final Voters Register (FVR) from 3,300 civil and voter registration Centres. It was observed that some exhibition centres were not opened due to the absence of exhibition staff and materials. The turnout at Exhibition centres was very low and there were little or no presence of security personnel and political party agents⁶. In the exhibition centre where the NEC officials were present, it was observed by monitors of the National Elections Watch (NEW) that there were inconsistencies in the application of the exhibition procedures. For instance, in some centres, the Provisional Voter Register (PVR) was not displayed, leading to overcrowding around the Exhibition Officer (EO) who verifies voters details in the Provisional Voter Register on the table.⁷

Recommendations:

For the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL)

- The GoSL should investigate incidents of violence, as reported across the country and advice on appropriate actions to end impunity through appropriate engagement of the Independent Police Complaints Board.

For the NEC/PPRC/NCD/IMC:

- The National Electoral Commission (NEC) and 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;
- The PPRC and NEC to work with 12 registered political parties, the Campaign for Good Governance, the National Elections Watch and other appropriate CSOs to recommit to the code of conduct to work together and ensure a peaceful electoral process through a public signing ceremony;

⁶ <https://awoko.org/2017/09/04/sierra-leone-news-voter-exhibition-wanted-political-party-agents/>

⁷ Ibid, <https://awoko.org/2017/09/04/sierra-leone-news-voter-exhibition-wanted-political-party-agents/>

- The PPRC, WANEP, CGG and appropriate CSOs should design and implement dispute management training programs for the political parties to enhance political tolerance and conflict management in the lead up to the elections;
- The NEC to investigate, clarify and communicate the cases of double registration on the Provisional Voter Register to prevent conflicts around this issue;
- The National Commission for Democracy must strengthen the civic and voter education efforts and provide information in local languages to improve citizen confidence and trust in the credibility of the electoral process;
- The Independent Media Commission and the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists should consider efforts for journalists and media organizations that reinforces they capacity to report on conflict sensitive issues.

For the Political Parties:

- Political parties to work with the District Election Code Monitoring Committees, WANEP, CGG and other appropriate CSOs to develop dispute resolution mechanisms at the national and district levels to mitigate emerging disputes among party members and supporters;
- National Elections Response Group to organise awareness programs on political tolerance, non-violence for youth membership of political parties at national and district levels.

For the Security Agencies:

- The Integrated Security Planning Committee could work with the National Youth Commission to engage youth at the district level on non-violence education;
- The Office of National Security should consider working with the Provincial, District and Chiefdom Security Committees and with relevant CSOs to develop appropriate early warning systems that facilitates informed responses to identified threats of election related violence at all levels;
- The Chiefdom Security Committees to work with appropriate Community Based Organisations (CBOs) to organise town hall meeting on political tolerance and non-violence which improves civil-security relations in the lead up to the elections;

For the Civil Society and the Media:

- The Civil Society Organisations to design and implement peace messages and non violence programs for political parties and youth groups at the community level with emphasis on high risk areas such as Kono, Kailahun, Kenema, Western Urban and Western Rural Districts;
- The National Election Response Group (NERG) and the National Election Watch (NEW) to organise town hall interactive meetings to disseminate information on peaceful elections and community dialogue to discourage youth and citizens mobilizations to violence;
- The Inter-Religious Councils and the National Council of Paramount Chiefs should work with NERG to organize joint programs for educating their constituents of responsible political participation and non-violence during the electoral cycle.