



National Early Warning System (NEWS)

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

September 2017

Introduction

As Sierra Leone moves towards the March 2018 general elections, there is increased concern by Civil Society Organizations and citizens on whether the election timetable by National Elections Commission will be completed as currently planned. This concern is exacerbated by reports of missing data, double registration, delay in government's funding of the process and reports of political party intolerance and violence.

Even though the election is perceived by Sierra Leoneans to be a straight contest between the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) and the All Peoples Congress (APC) Party, emerging parties like the Alliance Democratic Party (ADP) and the National Grand Coalition (NGC) – a coalition of smaller parties signals a positive development to the growth of democracy in the country.

As part of the electoral calendar, the Country's Parliament will be dissolved on 7th December 2017, in line with the constitution that provide the country with a three-month period for party nominations, campaigns and voting for presidential, parliamentary and local council candidates.

Although some members of the SLPP have expressed concern that they were not given a level playing field during their primary convention to elect party members in Kenema, some observers have described the election of SLPP National Officers as “very credible, transparent, free and fair”.

The Current Election Security Threats in Sierra Leone

Physical Violence and Destruction of Properties

- On August 29th 2017, the Alliance Democracy Party office in the central business district of Freetown was gutted by fire and the leadership attributed the incident to “silencing opposition” in the country. However, the All Peoples Congress (APC) Party Spokesperson, Hon. Robin Falley rejected the claims¹. Police investigations are underway to determine the cause of the fire at the ADP’s office.
- On September 15th, 2017, the Sierra Leone Magistrate Court No 1, Siaka Steven Street in Freetown, prosecuted and jailed a sitting Councillor of the All Peoples Congress (APC) for the death of three people in a Poro Bush of Waterloo. Councillor Sonny Caulker, Headman-James Harding and Agibu Sawaneh, were charged on three-counts of conspiring with other persons unknown to commit murder contrary to section 4 of the Offense against the Persons Act of 1861². Prosecution Police released evidence in court that the accused persons on April 2017 took the deceased men for an initiation into the Poro Society³. The case was presided by Magistrate Albert Moddy⁴.

Violent Communication

- On September 13, 2017, the former Chairman and a presidential candidate of the SLPP, John Oponjo Benjamin, complained of intimidation and harassment by supporters of his opponent Julius Maada Bio⁵. John Oponjo Benjamin referred to Maada Bio and his supporters as thugs and violent shooters in the party.
- On September 29th, 2017, the Commissioner Western Area, Madam Maitta French issued a report to the Political Parties Liaison Committee (PPLC) that she received assassination threats directed to her and the Chief Electoral Commissioner based on how they handled the Provisional Voter Register (PVR) and the release of the final voter register⁶.

¹ Source: News24, “NGOs warns credibility of Sierra Leone elections at risk,” September 1st, 2017.

² <http://www.cirp.org/library/legal/UKlaw/oap1861/>

³ The **Poros**, is a men's secret society in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea and the Ivory Coast, introduced by the Mande people. It is sometimes referred to as a hunting society and only males are admitted to its ranks. The female counterpart of the Poro society is the Sande society.

⁴ Salone Times Newspaper, 06/09/2017.

⁵ Source: Awareness Times, 13th Sept 2017.

⁶ Radio Democracy FM 98.1, on its Good Morning Salone program.

Ethics and Procedure:

- Dr. Kandeh Yumkella, a former United Nations Under-Secretary General and a member of the Sierra Leone's Peoples Party (SLPP) has tendered his resignation to the party citing irreconcilable differences, intimidations, falsehood, violation of rules, divisive messages, lack of focus, loss of credibility and harassments. He complained of bias and lack of level playing field as the party prepares for flagbearer nomination on November 7, 2017. He threatened that thousands of members would exit the party to continue their political agenda under the National Grand Coalition (NGC).
- On Wednesday, September 13, 2017, Engineer, Andrew Keili, a presidential aspirant under the SLPP, officially withdrew his candidacy at a Press Conference organized at the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) Headquarters in Freetown. He claimed lack of equity and distrust in the ability of national officers of the SLPP to preside over the party's National Convention held from 15th - 17th September 2017⁷.
- On Wednesday, September 13, 2017, the Secretary General of the All Peoples Congress, Ambassador Foday Osman Yanseneh accused the National Electoral Commission Chief Electoral Commissioner, Mohamed N'fah Alie Conteh and his team of inability to provide a comprehensive report on the missing 30,000 names of eligible voters from the Provisional Voter Register (PVR), and have been unable to demonstrate openness about the reported effort to address the problem⁸. The Commission blamed it on faulty chips and reconfiguration to wrong centers and indicated the situation was manageable⁹.

⁷ Radio Democracy F.M.

⁸ New Vision, Thursday September 14, 2017

⁹ Source: APA News "Sierra Leone: Missing data cast doubts over 2018 polls", August 30, 2017.

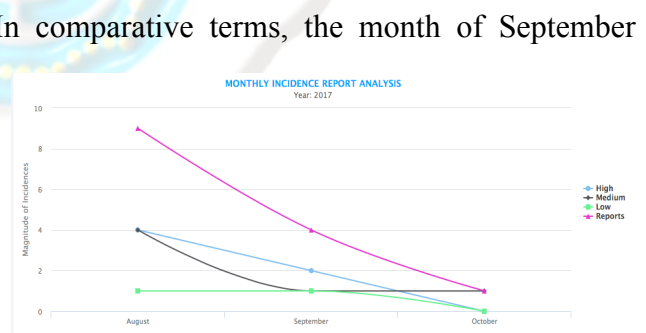
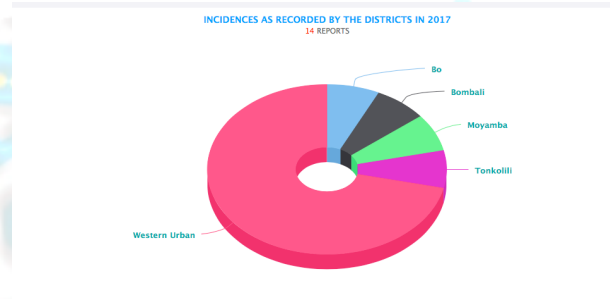
Statistical Overview of Election Security Threats¹⁰

Based on WANEP's NEWS reports of September 2017, there were incidents in five out of 14 districts, namely Western Urban, Bo, Bombali, Moyamba and Tonkolili. A total of 14 incident reports were submitted for the month. Out of which Western Urban recorded the highest number of cases relating to issues around Provisional Voter Register and three politically related deaths.

In line with the categories of indicators for NEWS reports, Ethics and Procedure recorded 35% of all reported incidents; Physical violence and Violent Communication recorded 14%. In comparative terms, the month of September recorded an overall frequency increase in the total number of political related incidents from the available data of August that recorded three incidents related to physical violence.

Regional Spotlight-Kono

Kono district attracts the spotlight for the month of September 2017 as one of the potential hotspots for election violence in the 2018 elections¹¹. Kono District is considered a swing district, which increases the intense competition between the major political parties¹². This is primarily due to the ethnic diversity of the district's population and the fact that two of Sierra Leone's largest ethnic groups the Mende and Temne do not form a major population of the District. Representation of the District in Parliament is equal between SLPP and APC members. It is a major campaign stop during Presidential elections. The District leaned towards the APC in municipal and local elections held in 2008 and 2011, though the SLPP still maintain strong



¹⁰ WANEP National Early Warning System

¹¹ Influence Mapping of Key Stakeholders and Hotspot Areas for the Mitigation of Election Threats in Sierra Leone General Election of 2018. Report commissioned by WANEP. April 2017

¹² Kono is described as a swing district because in all the democratic elections held so far, the two major political parties have the chances of winning in each constituency. So the competition is always knee in Kono. One instance is during the 2007 elections, even when the former Vice President was a Kono, the SLPP made a head way there by winning many votes .

support in the District. The SLPP previously controlled the Kono District Council local government and the Koidu city council until 2008 when the APC representatives were elected. The SLPP won Kono District in the past three Sierra Leone Presidential elections held in 1996, 2002 and 2007.

Recommendations:

For the DERG/NERG/CSOs:

- CSOs and DERG Kono should develop peace messages disseminated through social media, posters and billboards to educate youths and discourage their involvement in election violence in the districts;
- DERG Kono should engage the various political parties at the District on constructive dialogue and elicit commitment of good conduct from its supporters and members before, during and after the elections;
- DERG and CSOs should organize community mediation training for traditional rulers to deepen their skills and roles as arbiters to resolve stakeholder disputes that could threaten the peaceful conduct of the elections in the district;
- NERG and DERG should organize town hall meetings to disseminate information on peaceful elections and community dialogue to discourage youth and citizen mobilization to violence;
- NERG should strengthen cooperation with ONS and NEC in order to build community-security relations for monitoring and mitigating threats to the election;
- CSOs should train NEC and PPRC officials at national and district levels on mediation and dispute management to enhance their capacity to intervene in disputes before, during and after the elections;

For IPAC/NEC/PPRC/PPLC:

- NEC should strengthen its communication and dialogue with Inter Party Advisory Committee (IPAC) to enhance confidence and trust in the electoral process.

- The Political Parties Liaison Committee should organize multi stakeholder dialogues at district levels as a dispute resolution mechanism to mitigate political party disputes in the chiefdoms and districts;

For NCD/IMC/Inter Religious Council:

- The Independent Media Commission should monitor and sanction respective media used as platform for disseminating hate speeches;
- The National Commission for Democracy and the Inter Religious Council should embark on peace education and non-violence campaigns at high-risk areas such as Kono, Kailahun, Pujehun and Western Area.