



## **Preliminary Findings**

### **Election Observation on the General Election in Liberia**

*Tuesday 10 October 2023*

#### **1) Introduction**

Following the establishment of the Group of Seven Plus (g7+) Election Observation Mission (EOM) as part of peer learning and sharing of experience under its flagship program ‘Fragile to Fragile’ cooperation on 22 March, 2023 in Freetown, Sierra Leone, the g7+ has conducted election observation mission in 4 member states, namely; Timor-Leste (on 21 May 2023), Guinea Bissau (on 4 June 2023), Sierra Leone (on 24 June 2023) and Liberia (on 10 October 2023).

Election is one of the most important phases in the trajectory of our member countries. They are milestones that determine chances of democracy, stability and peace. In line with the vision of the g7+, member countries have inspiring lessons to share and learn from each other.

As an Inter-Governmental organization that brings together conflict affected countries including Liberia that helps achieving Peace, and stability through peer learning, this mission is aimed at contributing to a number of objectives, as follows:

- Promote peer learning and share of experiences in managing elections;
- Contribute to enhance democratic consolidation, strengthening peace and development
- Improve National Election Commission (NEC) operations through recommendations

The g7+ Election Observation Mission comprising of members accredited by National Election Commission (NEC) of Liberia to observe the general election in Liberia on 10 October 2023. The mission took place from 7 to 12 October 2023. The members of the mission comprised of:

1. Mr. Abdullai M. Bangurah (Head of Delegation), Chairman of Political Parties Regulatory Commission (PPRC) of Sierra Leone
2. Dr. Helder da Costa, General Secretary of g7+

3. Dr. Felix Piedade, Chief Operating Officer of g7+
4. Mr. Cesario Barreto, Logistic Assistant of g7+
5. Mr. Ezequiel das Neves, Local media Journalist from Timor-Leste

During its mission, the delegation paid a courtesy visit to the Chairman of National Election Commission (NEC) of Liberia, H.E. Davidetta Lansanah and the 6 Commissioners in order to have an understanding and a comprehensive knowledge on election procedures.

The delegation was divided into two teams and observed a total of 20 voting precincts and 47 polling places, majority locates in Montserrado (Electoral District 5, 6, 8, 9, 10) and only few at Margibi (Electoral District 1). A checklist form was utilized to observe the electoral process, starting from the opening, polling, closure and counting procedures.

We observed the electoral process from a ***perspective of impartiality, independence, professionalism and objectivity*** which are in line with international best practices and follow the electoral rules and regulation that stipulated in Liberia, including to Code of Conduct for Observers.

The Electoral National Commission (NEC) of Liberia reported that a total of 2,471,617 registered voters (1,237,257 men and 1,234,360 women) to participate in the elections. These voters are divided into 2,080 Voting Precincts and 5,890 polling places across the country.

## 2) **Election Observation**

- First of all, we would like to congratulate the Liberian people who have casted their votes and contribution to the peaceful election in Liberia. This shows Liberia is moving towards the right path to resilience.
- We commend the National Election Commission (NEC) of Liberia for successfully conducting this general election, an important milestone for the improvement of Liberia electoral management bodies.
- We applauded to all leaders of political parties who signed the Farmington River Declaration, a commitment for no-violence during the electoral process, which has demonstrated an assurance for democratic consolidation and strengthening peace in Liberia.

- Our report covers observation of three important events, namely: (1) Campaign Activities, (2) Election Day and (3) Tallying Process.

## ***2.1. Campaign Activities***

- The g7+ EOM observed the last day of campaigning by political parties in the city of Monrovia. It was surprising to see several opposition parties and the current ruling party campaigning without any major reports of inappropriate behavior or disturbances.
- We admired the enthusiasm and passive movement of political parties supporters who have demonstrated through their acts during the political rally. The security agents were also sociable. This is a clear demonstration of the political maturity of the people of Liberia with respect to political opponents and political tolerance. This lesson will certainly be shared with other g7+ member states.
- The unlimited campaign hours, which allow some activities continue to happen until evening time shows maturity and tolerance of Liberian people.
- It was impressive to see the removal of all campaign material at public places during the cooling off period, one day before the election day.
- However, we noticed that some political leaders in their campaign, used of hate speech and incendiary statement as we observed through the media.
- We only identified one minor incident; there was a violence occurred during a campaign of CDC party on 8 October. A young man who wore other party's T-shirt were attacked by supporters of CDC. We avoided the area immediately for our safety precaution.

## ***2.2. Elections Day***

### ***2.2.1. Opening of polls***

- Most Voting Precincts opened on time at 8am according to what is prescribed at the election law
- All sensitive materials and polling staff were ready at the polling places before the opening hours.
- Polling Staff were knowledgeable on opening procedures and demonstrated their act in a transparent manner, including in the seal of the ballot box and announced the total of ballot papers.
- The ballot boxes were sealed in the presence of the party agents and observers and invited to note the seal numbers.
- The number of ballot papers were shared with the party agents and observers who were present at the polling places before the start of the polls.

- During the opening, we observed the presence of national and other international observers, for example, ECOWAS, the AU, the EU, the Carter Centre, Mano River Union (MRU) and Yiaga Africa at the Voting Precincts.

### *2.2.2. Polling Day*

- Majority of Voting Precincts were generally conducive and had proper lay out, with the exception that some having small rooms, no lights and a lesser amount of ventilation, which create uncomfortable environment, particularly for voters.
- Queues at polling places observed were largely peaceful, despite some signs of impatience shown during the queue.
- However, there were tensions at most of the polling places where voters including mothers, elderly and people with disability were struggling to enter the polling places.
- It is encouraging to see that there was no heavy police presence in the polling places, which implies that the environment is safe and secure.
- At one voting precinct that we visited, we witnessed one elderly female voter who were almost fainted and seek for help from us.
- The Presiding Officers were very cooperative, helpful and responsive to questions by observers.
- Polling staff performs their role in a professional and impartial manner.
- We observed voters to a greater degree were knowledgeable about the voting process.
- We also noticed there was a good gender balance between polling staff at the most of the polling places, which is commendable
- Assistant to voters with special needs (elderly and people with disability), including pregnant women and women carrying babies in their back was given priority to vote, whenever necessary at polling places.
- Voting booths were well organized and ensure the secrecy of the ballot.
- Most of polling places that we observed, a place is provided for party agents to observe the whole process and the presence of both national and international observers and media.
- We only identified two incidents during the polling process, at one polling place, there was an attempt by a male voter to vote twice at the same polling places and at another places, a male voter was wearing a fake ID card, claiming himself to be as Supervisor and tried to coerce other voters in voting. Both voters were identified and arrested by the police on duty.

### *2.2.3. Closure and Counting*

- The polling places observed, closed on time at 6 pm and voters that already on the queue were allowed to vote.
- In one voting precinct, the polling staff had to deny the entry of a voter who arrived after a few minutes of the closure time, which shows that the polling staff really follows the rules.
- Polling staff conducted the reconciliation process in a professional and transparent manner in the presence of party's agent, observers and media.
- Votes were counted in full view of party agents, observers, and security personnel.
- Counting procedures were largely followed except for some challenges in few polling places where the presiding officers had to be corrected by party agents.
- The counting at the polling places visited was done without major incidents, however, we observed there was high number of invalid votes in some polling places and some ballot papers were placed in different ballot box by voters.
- It was also noted that different total number of ballot papers used for Presidential, Senate and House Representative, which require further scrutinize.
- Provisional results at polling places observed were recorded on polling places forms, verified and signed by party agents and copies issued to them.

### **2.3. Tallying Process**

- The Tallying process was conducted at the SKD Sports Stadium with almost four hours delayed due to logistical issues. Counting procedures using big screens were largely followed, except for some corrections on discrepancy of total of valid and invalid votes in full view of party agents and observers.
- The tallying process of Presidential, Senate and House of Representatives were meticulously carried out, following the guidelines by the NEC officials.
- The results of the votes were entered into a computer and safely saved.
- It is also worth noting the big margin between total of unused, spoiled and discarded ballot papers (295) exceeded the number of ballot papers that should be in the ballot box (255). This can be seen for example in one voting Precinct (VCR Code 30032).
- The counting process is still continuing at the time of preparation of this report, and it is expected to last for a few days.

### 3) Recommendations

The primary objective of our mission is to help improve National Election Commission (NEC) Liberia through the following recommendations:

1. Considering the high turnout voters in most of Voting Precincts visited, it is important to ensure the proper lay out of polling places and increase voting precincts to allow free movement of voters.
2. In order to ensure that voters who experience difficulty with health condition during the election day, it is advisable to have a mobile medical team to cover certain number of Voting Precincts in a specified electoral district.
3. The need to review legal framework with the view to proscribing conducts like hate speech, ethnic and regional rhetoric and incendiary statement that may heighten political tension widen divide.
4. Encourage more women participation in politics considering that the women candidate for house representative is only around 15% while for Presidential candidate is only 2%.
5. As an abundance of caution, it is recommended the campaign be limited during the day time, politics being a motive of unpredictable.
6. There is a need for electoral education in order to minimize the high number of invalid votes and put ballot paper in the right box.

### 4) Conclusion

- We observed that the general election in Liberia, in general was **peaceful, transparent and fair**.
- The g7+ Election Observation Mission reiterates that this is an initial assessment of the electoral process for the October 10<sup>th</sup> General Election in Liberia and therefore solicit the continuous cooperation from all political parties and state actors in Liberia.
- The g7+ will continue to promote its program of Fragile-to-Fragile Program, provide a platform for member countries including Liberia also to learn from other countries experience as an official from NEC Liberia has joined the mission in Sierra Leone to observe the election on 24 June 2023.
- We look forward for our continued collaboration in the future as part of strengthening our state institution and also democracy in our country.