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PRESIDENTIAL RUN-OFF ELECTION DAY SITUATIONAL STATEMENT – NOVEMBER 14, 2023

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“The availability of the election materials and logistical arrangement were improved as compared to the first round and the process has been peaceful despite isolated incidents”.

Introduction

This midday statement is based on reports that the Elections Coordinating Committee (ECC) has received from 1,176 out of the 1,200 (98%) Stationary Observers deployed to their polling places nationwide as of 2:00 pm during the Presidential run-off election on November 14, 2023.

This report focuses on the set-up and opening of polling places. Percentages reported reflect percentages of polling places observed by the ECC observers who are proportionately distributed across electoral districts of the country and do provide credible data on national trends. At this time, the ECC has received 98% of reports from its 1200 Stationary Observers.

ARRIVAL AT POLLING PLACES

- 99% of ECC observers were permitted to access and observe at their polling places. By 6:00am, 91% of all ECC Observers were at their assigned polling places and in 96% of those places, found the NEC polling officials to be present.
- Queues of voters outside the voting precinct at 6:00 am were reported in 91% of observed locations.

OPENING

- ECC observers reported that voting generally commenced on time (before 8:15 am) in 99% of the observed polling places, only 1% of polling places opened with a slight delay between 8:15 and 10 am. The ECC commends the NEC for the measures taken to avoid the logistical challenges observed during the first round which previously led to late opening of polling places.

POLLING PLACES SET-UP

- With the smooth opening of polling places, observers reported systematic availability of the required sensitive voting materials, including the Final Registration Roll (FRR), ballot papers, indelible ink to curtail multiple voting and the accounting forms present. Even so, ECC observers reported an improved availability of the tactile ballot guide (at 92%) for visually impaired voters compared to the first round of the election process when the tactile ballot was present in only 89% of observed polling places.
- In 86% of observed polling places, five or more NEC staff were present during setup. Around 46% of the polling staff were women at observed polling places. ECC commends the NEC for giving women the opportunity to serve.
- In 98% of polling places where ECC observers are located, observers saw security personnel in the area. ECC commends the joint security for the improved coverage during both rounds of the election given that the provision of security is the sole responsibility of internal security agencies.
- The ECC observed the presence of both CDC and UP agents in 88% of observed the polling places. Additionally, some ECC mobile observers noted that party agents had copies of the FRR and were seen verifying voters in some areas before being allowed to vote. This is a demonstration of improved transparency of the voting process.

CRITICAL INCIDENTS

The ECC Data Center is also collecting critical incident reports from all 1,738 observers that are continually being processed. Generally, ECC notes that despite the peaceful conduct of voting, the atmosphere is tense and has been characterized by a few challenges.

There were reports of isolated tension at polling places due to misunderstanding and trust from voters.

- ▶ In Montserrado electoral district 13, the ECC observer at the Deaf Ministry INC/ Elizabeth Silem School of Hope with precinct code 30058 reported the NEC queue controller absent which resulted in the irregularity of the line. This caused the voting process to stop for over 15 minutes due to a lack of control.

- ▶ In Lofa at Esther Woiwor School with precinct code 21137, ballot papers were observed not being stamped and party agents raised the issue but the magistrate said that stamping the paper is not a major thing because once the voter marks the paper correctly the vote will be counted and it will not be considered as an invalid vote. The ECC will continue to keep a close eye on the process and report any other emerging issues or concerns.

The ECC continues to observe the process and will have more information in future updates.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The ECC presents the following interim recommendations to further improve the process:

To the NEC:

- ECC urges the National Elections Commission (NEC) to increase the frequency (at least twice a day) of reporting of election results.

To Political Parties:

- Parties are encouraged to urge their agents to remain engaged with the process up to the counting and tabulation of results.

- Political parties should respect the authority of the NEC to announce official election results.

To Security:

- Remain vigilant as voting is underway to counter any attempts of intimidation, threat or harassment at the voting precincts.
- That they provide the required logistics for the safe transportation of election materials to the NEC offices.

To Citizens:

- Remain calm as the process unfolds and while we await official results to be announced by the NEC.

OBSERVATION METHODOLOGY

The ECC has deployed 1738 trained observers – 1500 short-term observers, 73 electoral district supervisors, and 19 county coordinators to observe the presidential run-off election. The ECC trained and deployed an additional 146 district observers to support supervision and the observation of the tally process at the NEC's magisterial offices. Of the 1500 STOs, 1200 are deployed as stationary observers stationed at polling places throughout election day, and the remaining 300 short-term observers are mobile. The 146 district observers, county coordinators, and supervisors are also mobile observers, reporting on the general electoral environment.

About ECC

The Elections Coordinating Committee (ECC) is Liberia's largest domestic election observation network with diverse competencies, experiences, and expertise in democracy, elections, and governance established since 2010. ECC's members include the Center for Democratic Governance (CDG); Center for Media Studies and Peace Building (CEMESP); Center for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding (CECPAP); Institute for Research and Democratic Development (IREDD); Naymote Partners for Democratic Development (NAYMOTE-PADD); West Africa Network for Peace Building (WANEP), and the Women NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL). The ECC election observation effort is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Irish-Aid. "The contents of this update are the responsibility of the ECC and does not necessarily reflect the views of USAID, the United States Government or the Government of Ireland."