



Key dates for 2007:

- **January 26:** Election Observer Registration Begins
- **February 26:** Voter Registration Launch Event
- **February 26 - March 18:** Voter Registration
- **May 21-25:** Exhibition of Preliminary Voter Roll
- **May 28-29:** Inquiry Process
- **June 24:** Voter List Complete
- **May (TBA):** Political Party Candidate Nominations
- **TBA:** Campaign Period
- **July 28:** Election Day

2006 in Review: A Nation Prepares to Go to the Polls

The year 2006 was a very productive one for Sierra Leone's National Electoral Commission (NEC). The NEC spent the past 12 months building a new team from the ground up and preparing for the historic July 2007 elections—the country's second national polls since fighting ended in 2002.

In the past year, the NEC played a key role in the creation and introduction of the Political Party Code of Con-

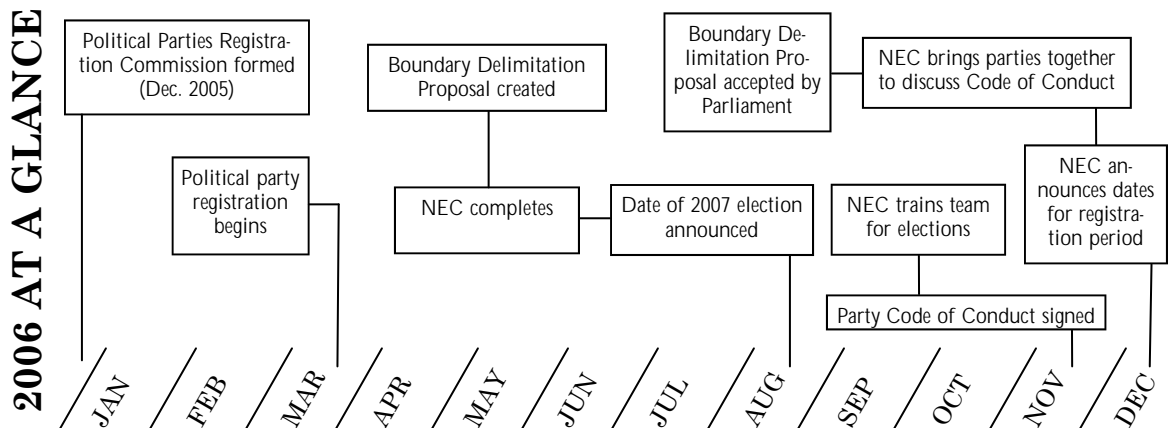
duct. The Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC) will monitor compliance with the Code of Conduct throughout the election period.

Following a comprehensive training program for its new team, in December the NEC submitted a proposal on voting district boundary delimitation, which Parliament approved.

The NEC recently completed its voter registration

kits, which will be used during upcoming civil society-sponsored voter education programs. After these programs, the NEC's next task will be the registration of the Sierra Leonean electorate during the February-March voter registration period.

With the cooperation of its international and local partners, the NEC will fulfill its mandate by overseeing Sierra Leone's historic July 28 national elections.



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The Next Step: Nomination of Party Candidates

Following the voter registration process, the next critical moment in Sierra Leone's electoral process will be the political party candidate nomination process, tentatively scheduled to commence in May.

In the past, the candidate nomination process in Sierra Leone was not open to public debate or scrutiny. As a result, the majority of party members had no voice in candidate selection. In some instances this led critics to

argue that the secretive nature of the selection processes allowed parties to nominate unqualified candidates.

Many political parties have heard these criticisms of the nomination processes and are responding by instituting sometimes elaborate selection mechanisms to choose candidates. Some parties establish committees with many types of members to nominate potential candidates, while others might

select candidates through small senior-level committees with little input from citizens or low-ranking members.

Some parties place special consideration on women, youth, and disabled candidates. Of critical concern to elections stakeholders is the involvement of Paramount or Section Chiefs, who are prohibited by law from

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choosing sides or otherwise influencing the nomination of candidates.

The NEC and its civil society part-

ners are planning targeted voter education activities to combat the interference of Paramount Chiefs in the electoral process and promote equitable candidate selection processes.

Once candidates are nominated they will be selected by registered party members at party conventions. Selected candidates will eventually appear on the ballots in July.

NEC Readies for Approaching Voter Registration Process

The National Electoral Commission (NEC) is a body appointed by the government and approved by a parliamentary committee. Dr. Christiana Thorpe is the NEC's chair.

Last year, to maintain its independence, the NEC overhauled its entire staff, and required all new personnel to sign agreements rejecting political affiliation during the course of their duties.

Currently the NEC is preparing for the voter registration process,

training polling agents throughout February to staff the country's 2,807 registration centers.

To facilitate the flow of information, the NEC, through its External Relations Unit (ERU), is teaming up with interested Sierra Leonean and international organizations to educate citizens. The ERU recently released a training handbook and a series of voter education posters that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can deliver through their

voter education programs. The ERU also developed voter education materials targeted to people with disabilities, youth, and women.

Registration of voters begins February 26 and continues until March 18. The NEC will exhibit the preliminary voter roll between May 21 and 25. During this time period, citizens can check to see that their names are accurately recorded. Following an inquiry process, the NEC will complete the voters roll on June 24.

Election Monitoring Groups Prepare for July Ballots

The National Election Watch (NEW), a coalition of monitoring organizations, is the largest body of its kind in Sierra Leone. Two other organizations, the Independent Election Monitoring Group and the Coalition of Election Monitoring Groups, have formed, and plan to field observers for the July elections.

NEW maintains a membership of over 75 associate member organizations, working throughout the country

to monitor elections. With the support of the British Department for International Development (DFID), NEW plans to field its largest delegation ever, involving some 5,000 observers, for the 2007 elections.

While NEW maintains a positive relationship with the NEC, it has not hesitated to point out areas of concern. In this election season, Sierra Leonean election monitors have highlighted several priority issues in par-

ticular. These issues include: interference from Paramount Chiefs in the election process, the NEC's reduction of registration centers around the country, mobility of voters during an election conducted during the rainy season, and the appointment of a full-time PPRC chairperson.

NDI plans to coordinate short- and long-term international election observers with the NEW to increase the impact of observation efforts.

Working Together to Ensure a Peaceful Election Period

The Sierra Leonean Police (SLP) and Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) will provide security for the country's national elections in July.

In addition, the UN is closely monitoring the situation in Sierra Leone in coordination with the National Electoral Commission (NEC).

The US and British governments have sponsored activities to train security forces, political party activists, and NGO staff in conflict mitigation. The NEC has called on stakeholders to consider adding an element of conflict mediation into training curricula.

If your organization would like to receive or deliver conflict mediation training during the election cycle, please contact NDI to find out how.



Calm on the streets of Freetown as preparations continue for the July 28 ballots.

Sierra Leone's Civil Society and Donors Collaborate

Domestic and international NGOs have been active in conducting programs to support the elections. For example, they have spread voter education materials throughout Sierra Leone.

Programs range from the Disabilities Awareness Action Group's (DAAG) program for people with disabilities, supported by USAID to 50/50's women candidates' training, funded by DFID. Political parties can find a partner in the Westminster Foundation program, which has conducted candidate training seminars in Freetown. Swiss NGO Hironnelle is providing media training to local news outlets, while NDI offers small grants to domestic NGOs for voter education projects.

The British Voluntary Service Organization (VSO) has provided technical experts to the NEC and local NGOs to strengthen capacity. While these education efforts have made a difference, much more effort will be needed to meet civil society's growing demand. Currently DAAG is looking for help mobilizing people with disabilities during the February-March



Civil society organizers coordinate their operations at a recent voter registration planning session at NDI headquarters in Freetown.

registration period.

If your organization would like to become involved in election-related activities in Sierra Leone by provid-

ing human or material resources such as vehicles, equipment, or training space, please contact NDI today to coordinate assistance.

UN Elections Basket Fund an Invaluable Resource

Possibly the largest single contributor to the current election-related operations in Sierra Leone is the UN Elections Basket Fund.

Initiated in 2005, the Fund operates on the principle of seven steps to election reform. It called for a complete restructuring of the NEC, building staff capacity, developing infrastructure, improving information

technology systems, reforming electoral laws, delimiting boundaries, and finally the creation of a permanent voters' roll. The UN Basket Fund is supported by contributions from the UK, the European Union, Ireland, and the Government of Sierra Leone.

Other governments such as that of the United States, Japan, Denmark, and Germany are also supporting the

election process through direct assistance to the NEC, CSOs, the PPRC, and other stakeholders. To support the election process, UN experts are assisting the NEC and PPRC at the national and district levels.

The UN Election Basket Fund has already contributed to significant positive gains, including support of the boundary delimitation last year.

PPRC and PPLC: Political Parties' Vital Links

The Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC) is mandated by the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone and the 2002 Political Parties Act. Along with the NEC and political parties, the PPRC established the Political Party Code of Conduct, and is reviewing the document with party stakeholders in all four major regions of the country. The PPRC also plans to conduct step-down seminars on the

Code at the district and chiefdom levels. In the past, the PPRC conducted seminars on the importance of women in the political process, and plans future trainings on conflict resolution.

The PPRC is a vital part of the election process as all stakeholders will look to this body to enforce the Code of Conduct and maintain a level playing field for candidates.

A second important body, the Po-

litical Party Liaison Committee (PPLC), compliments the PPRC's work in enforcing the Code of Conduct. The PPLC will provide a constant link between election officials and Sierra Leone's political parties.

IFES, through support from USAID, is providing technical support to the PPRC and the PPLC. IFES will also assist both on matters related to conflict prevention during elections.

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Learn Public Speaking Skills with NDI



Participants at a recent speechmaking and message development workshop take notes on the fundamentals of effective public speaking.

NDI currently organizes and hosts a weekly public speaking club in our offices downtown.

Leaders and activists from political parties, NGOs, and civil society organizations and other elections stakeholders attend this two-hour group meeting every Wednesday evening from 5:00 pm to 7:00 pm.

To learn more, contact Mohamed Konneh at mkonneh@ndi.org.

NDI in Sierra Leone

Since launching its Sierra Leone program in 2001, NDI has worked with a variety of actors to strengthen democracy in the country.

Currently NDI is partnering with Sierra Leonean civic organizations to conduct voter education campaigns during the electoral process. In conjunction with the PPRC, the Institute is also working with political parties to support their efforts in the registration process, train them to monitor polls, and strengthen campaign financing.

NDI is also working with the independent media in Sierra Leone to help ensure that the electoral process is observed and reported in a balanced manner.

In addition, NDI is providing support to independent Sierra Leonean election observation organizations and fielding additional teams of its own international election observers to promote transparency throughout the electoral process.

Additional information on NDI's programming in Sierra Leone can be found at:

<http://www.ndi.org/worldwide/cewa/sierraleone/sierraleone.asp>.

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