



**PRELIMINARY STATEMENT OF THE NDI  
INTERNATIONAL OBSERVER DELEGATION TO THE  
SIERRA LEONEAN PRESIDENTIAL RUN-OFF ELECTION**  
*Freetown, September 10, 2007*

This preliminary statement is offered by the National Democratic Institute's (NDI) international delegation to the presidential run-off election held in Sierra Leone on September 8, 2007. The leaders of the delegation are: **Nora Owen**, former Minister for Justice and former Member of Parliament (Ireland); **Ken Nnamani**, former Senate President (Nigeria); and **Christopher Fomunyoh**, NDI Senior Associate for Africa (Cameroon).

The delegation included 35 political and civic leaders, human rights activists, and election experts from 18 countries in Africa, Europe, and North America. The delegation visited Sierra Leone from September 3 through September 10, 2007, to assess preparations for and observe the 2007 presidential runoff election. The delegation built on the findings and recommendations of the NDI delegation to the August 11 presidential and parliamentary elections, two pre-election assessment teams sponsored by NDI in March and July, and a team of NDI long-term observers who, since April 2, have conducted election observation and reporting activities in all of Sierra Leone's 14 districts. The delegation met with Sierra Leonean leaders, including the presidential candidate of the All People's Congress (APC), Ernest Koroma, and the presidential candidate of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), Solomon Berewa. The delegation also met with National Electoral Commission (NEC) officials, media representatives, development partners, and members of other international observer delegations. The delegation benefited from meetings with civil society leaders from the National Election Watch (NEW), Disabilities Awareness Action Group (DAAG), Democracy Sierra Leone (DSL), the 50/50 Group, Campaign for Good Governance (CGG), and the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ).

The purposes of this delegation were to demonstrate the international community's interest in, and support for, the development of democratic institutions and processes in Sierra Leone, and to provide an impartial assessment of the September 8 poll. The delegation conducted its activities in accordance with the laws of Sierra Leone and the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, and without interference in the election process.

*The delegation recognizes that it is still too early to make definitive pronouncements about the electoral process as votes are still being tallied, official results have not yet been announced, and election-related complaints and challenges, should they arise, will need to be resolved in accordance with the rule of law. It is therefore not the intention of the delegation to render a complete or definitive assessment of the election process at this time. Indeed, it is the people of Sierra Leone who, as citizens and voters, will assess the legitimacy of these elections and their significance for consolidating democracy in this post-conflict environment. Further statements may be released by NDI in the post-election period, and a final report will follow after the election process is completed.*

Presented below is a summary of the delegation's preliminary findings.

## **I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The NDI delegation considers that the presidential run-off election was generally transparent and peaceful. It is the delegation's sincere hope that the participants in the run-off process will continue to act in the spirit of democracy through the period of vote tabulation, resolution of any complaints that may emerge, and the official determination of the successful candidate for president.

The delegation commends the people of Sierra Leone for their determination to exercise their civic and political rights, and the Government of Sierra Leone for helping to maintain a peaceful electoral environment. It also notes that overall NEC officials demonstrated a high level of professionalism in the conduct of this election. The NEC showed openness to suggestions from, and dialogue with, other Sierra Leonean stakeholders and members of the international community. The NEC's accomplishments are all the more significant given the logistical and infrastructural challenges of organizing elections in the rainy season. The NDI delegation recognizes the strong commitment of political parties, civil society organizations, religious leaders, and the media throughout Sierra Leone to a peaceful, democratic electoral process. The delegation applauds the above-mentioned stakeholders for the concrete steps they took to foster a peaceful and credible election in an atmosphere of mounting tensions and allegations of intimidation and violence in the period between the announcement of the first round results and the run-off election.

On September 8, 2007, the people of Sierra Leone voted to choose their next president. This will be the first time in Sierra Leonean history that a democratically elected president will have served two full terms and transferred power to another democratically elected leader. Sierra Leoneans voted in large numbers and election day was peaceful. The polls were well-administered in the majority of the areas this delegation observed. Political party agents from the two contesting parties were present in almost all polling stations, and nonpartisan Sierra Leonean election observers were also present in large numbers. In some cases, however, actions linked to supporters of both parties gave cause for concern. The impact of these actions will be determined as the NEC continues to collate and assess the integrity of polling data.

On election day, ballots were counted at the polling station and party agents were given copies of the results sheets. The votes are currently being tallied in Freetown, and the official results will be announced in the coming days. Political parties and their supporters should continue to act peacefully and in accordance with the rule of law. Sierra Leoneans, with the support of the international community, should watch closely and hold accountable anyone who seeks to undermine the credibility of the process and the peace and security that Sierra Leoneans have worked so hard to achieve.

Overall, the delegation noted improvements upon the first round that enhanced the efficiency and transparency of the process. The delegation understands, as do the people of Sierra Leone, that this election should be viewed as a step in the democratization process, rather than as an end in itself. Following these elections, democratic institutions must continue to be consolidated so that the government can be representative of, and accountable to the people. As NDI wrote in its preliminary statement on the August 11 polls, Sierra Leonean citizens and institutions are in the process of meeting the test of whether democratic culture is here to stay. Resolution of any formal complaints and challenges that may arise would be a key element of that test. This election, if successfully completed, would affirm the commitment of Sierra Leoneans to democratic governance. For the electoral process to be meaningful, newly elected leaders in Sierra Leone should strive to meet the expectations of citizens and institute policies that improve their wellbeing. To do so, elected leaders

should take concrete steps to mitigate inter-regional tensions, conduct their duties with integrity, manage the nation's resources for the good of the country, and provide opportunities for the country's youth.

## **II. ELECTORAL CONTEXT**

The emerging multi-party system in Sierra Leone is an encouraging sign for future governance, as are the country's efforts to foster a climate of political tolerance before and during these elections. Since the end of armed conflict in 2002, Sierra Leone has made progress towards achieving reconciliation and reconstruction.

The presidential run-off election was held two weeks after the official certification of first round results, as stipulated by the Sierra Leone Constitution and the Electoral Laws Act. The presidential elections are conducted through an absolute majority system in which a successful candidate must win at least 55 percent of the valid votes cast in the first round. If no candidate obtains 55 percent of the vote, a run-off election is held between the two leading candidates whereby a simple majority decides the result. Sierra Leone has a single national district for the presidential election.

On August 11, Ernest Koroma of the APC won 44 percent and Solomon Berewa of the SLPP won 38 percent of the vote, while Charles Margai of the People's Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC) won 14 percent of ballots cast. Of the 112 parliamentary seats filled after the August 11 elections, the APC won 59, the SLPP won 43, and the PMDC won 10. Sixteen seats (or 14 percent) were won by female candidates. Results for the 12 seats to be occupied by Paramount Chiefs have recently been announced.

The NEC reviewed electoral complaints related to the August 11 elections from 11 polling stations. Results from four polling stations (three in Kailahun and one in Tonkolili district) were subsequently invalidated. The irregularities in these specific cases pertained to an inexplicable excess of votes cast over registered voters. In one case, a large number of ballots appeared to have been marked by the same individual. According to the Constitution and Electoral Laws Act, the Supreme Court handles complaints pertaining to the presidential election.

The period surrounding the run-off election brought to the surface pre-existing political cleavages that run along ethnic and regional lines, although the vast majority of Sierra Leoneans continue to emphasize the importance of political tolerance. The campaign period in advance of the run-off election was marked by heightened tensions and limitations on the ability of candidates to campaign freely in all parts of the country.

The delegation was encouraged by the commitment of the people of Sierra Leone to ensure that election day was peaceful. However, skirmishes between supporters of political parties during the early part of the run-off period raised fears of further polarization and violence. Despite these concerns, Sierra Leonean political leaders continue to state their readiness to accept credible results. The delegation hopes that leaders maintain this commitment throughout the post-election period. Should candidates have challenges to the outcome of the election, they should seek redress through the proper legal mechanisms in accordance with the rule of law.

### III. OBSERVATIONS

**Election Administration.** The NEC drew upon the experience of the August 11 election and took concrete steps to enhance transparency in the electoral process through actions that included the revision of procedures and additional training of polling staff. Unlike the August 11 polls, party agents from the contesting parties were given copies of the polling station results forms, further contributing to the openness and integrity of the process. The delegation commends the NEC for conducting these elections in an efficient and responsive manner. These elections represent an opportunity to further strengthen the NEC's institutional capacity.

Overall the election was well-administered, and the NEC overcame many challenges; however, in some cases election administration was less organized, including instances where polling staff were not proficient with the procedures. This was particularly true in rural areas.

**Voter Education.** The NEC developed voter education messages about the purpose of the run-off election and informed citizens of changes in procedures. Other entities including civil society organizations and political parties also conducted voter education on the voting process. The cumulative effect of these efforts was a reduction in the number of invalid ballots in polling stations observed on September 8 as compared to the August 11 election.

**The Campaign.** The campaign period for the September election ran from Saturday, August 25, to Thursday, September 6. Overall, tensions were higher in the run-off campaign period than in advance of the August 11 elections, with several instances of violence and intimidation reported.

The first week of the campaign period saw a number of clashes between SLPP and APC supporters in Waterloo and Freetown, and in the districts of Kono, Kailahun, Kenema, and Bo. In some cases, the rise in violence coincided with the presence or planned travel of candidates and senior party officials to campaign in these localities. In a number of instances, interventions by the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC), NEC, and other Sierra Leonean organizations served to reduce tensions.

During the campaign period, the two presidential candidates and President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah signed a communiqué affirming their commitment to a peaceful electoral process in Sierra Leone. The candidates also agreed to participate in a joint peace rally in Freetown. Four days later, however, the APC candidate decided not to participate in the planned peace rally, maintaining that members of the SLPP had violated the terms of this communiqué by not allowing his party to campaign in certain areas.

As with the August 11 polls, political parties agreed to schedule campaign activities in order to avoid tensions and the potential for inter-party rivalries. However, few campaign events were conducted. Freedom of movement was restricted in several cases: Ernest Koroma and Charles Margai were prevented from entering Kailahun district, and the APC vice presidential candidate Samuel Sam-Sumana was stopped by a roadblock in Kono district. In other cases, political party supporters were prevented from moving in certain areas and entering certain districts.

**Media.** In the period leading up to the run-off election, some print media and radio ran inaccurate and unbalanced stories. SLAJ and the Independent Media Commission (IMC) called on the media to abide by the principles in the Media Code of Conduct and to avoid inflammatory and inaccurate stories. The IMC threatened to suspend the license of one media outlet.

## **ELECTION DAY**

Overall, voting on September 8 was conducted in a calm and peaceful atmosphere, and no significant incidents of violence were observed. The polls were generally well-organized and well-administered.

**Security on Election Day.** The police and other security forces were actively engaged in maintaining a peaceful environment on election day. The Sierra Leone Police (SLP) were present at most polling stations visited, and military police provided additional support, particularly in Freetown and throughout the western area. Prior to election day, the SLP Inspector General requested that military police provide additional support, under his supervision, to the SLP on election day. In instances where the SLP and military police were called to resolve situations, they responded quickly, acted professionally, and ensured that the environment on election day remained calm. As on August 11, the army did not interfere in the electoral process.

The SLP was also diligent in dispersing crowds and encouraging voters who had already cast their ballots to leave voting areas. On election night, the SLP established roadblocks in some areas of the country to ensure a peaceful environment.

**Voter Turnout.** Many observers noted that voters turned out in significant numbers. In comparison to August 11, this delegation noted that voters did not queue for hours to cast their ballots in the morning. Voter education messages emphasizing that the hours of voting were between 7:00am and 5:00pm may have contributed to a distribution of voters throughout the day. (See additional discussion on voter turnout in later section titled “Delegation Concerns.”)

**Balloting.** Overall, voting on September 8 was peaceful and orderly in most locations observed. Most polling stations opened on time. Polling officials generally appeared well-trained and conducted their duties with professionalism and integrity in the majority of stations observed. The identification of voters went smoothly, and polling officials seemed more familiar with the final voters register (FVR) than on August 11. In the majority of stations observed, ballot paper issuers stamped ballots, folded them correctly, and explained voting procedures with professionalism and impartiality. NEC polling staff made efforts to mark polling stations more clearly, and queue controllers were more efficient in conducting their duties.

Most voters seemed to understand the voting process, and fewer voters required assistance than on August 11. A simpler ballot, combined with citizens’ recent experience with voting in August, likely contributed to an increased understanding of the process. As on August 11, the NEC instituted mechanisms to protect against double-voting in the run-off election, including the hole punching of voter registration cards and the inking of fingers.

In some polling stations, particularly in the North, non-sensitive materials such as curtains for the voting booths or opening forms were missing. In these cases, staff addressed these gaps by using shirts or other materials as curtains and recording the necessary information in notebooks until the materials arrived later in the day.

**Political Party Agents.** In advance of the run-off election, the NEC adjusted its regulations for accredited party agents, allowing two agents from the APC and SLPP, as well as one party agent

from each party not contesting the run-off election, to monitor the polls. On election day there was some confusion in the implementation of this regulation.

Political party agents from both the APC and the SLPP were present in nearly all polling places visited by NDI observers. In some cases, NDI observers met party agents from the PMDC in the western area, and in the eastern and southern parts of the country. Overall, political party agents acted appropriately, and many of them seemed to have a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities than on August 11.

The delegation heard reports pertaining to agents from a contesting party being prohibited from monitoring the process on behalf of their candidate in parts of Kailahun, Pujehun, and Kenema. In these specific districts, observers visited 27 polling centers, and party agents for both APC and SLPP were present in 22 of these centers.

**Domestic and International Election Observation.** Domestic observers were present in significant numbers, as on August 11. The NEW fielded more than 5,400 observers across the country, covering 80 percent of polling stations on election day. The delegation also met observers from the Council of Churches in Sierra Leone, Hope Sierra Leone, the Evangelical Fellowship of Sierra Leone, the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone, Democracy Sierra Leone, the United Peace Front, and SHARE.

Several international organizations also monitored the elections, including the European Union (EU), the African Union (AU), the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and West African Civil Society Forum (WACSOF).

**Counting of Votes.** The vote count was conducted transparently and fairly at the majority of polling stations observed. Despite increased training of polling staff on identifying invalid ballots, in a few places NDI observers saw inconsistent application of NEC guidelines to accept ballots where the intent of the voter was clear. Unlike the August 11 polls, party agents from the contesting parties were given copies of the polling station results forms, further contributing to the transparency of the process. As in the first round, copies of the results were also posted outside polling stations.

**Delegation Concerns:** While polling centers were largely well-administered across the country, the delegation has concerns about events in specific areas, for example:

- In 14 polling stations (within 6 polling centers) visited by members of the delegation in Pujehun, Bo, and Kenema, voter turnout was approximately 100 percent by early afternoon. This raised serious questions about the integrity of the results in those particular stations. The delegation will continue to carefully track the results that come from these stations.
- The delegation received reports that party agents may have been blocked from monitoring polling activities in certain polling centers, particularly in Kailahun, Kenema, and Pujehun districts.
- In isolated cases, polling staff were confused about, or failed to follow procedures. For example, observers noted inconsistency in the inking of fingers, including polling staff neglecting to ink some voters' fingers. Although the NEC guidelines stipulated that

polling officials check voters' hands for ink before allowing them to vote, the delegation noted that the polling officials did not apply the procedure consistently.

- In several places observed, polling staff were unsure about the new NEC guidelines on the number of party agents allowed in each station. Non-sensitive materials, including some forms, pens, and ballot screen curtains, were delivered late or not at all to several stations, forcing polling staff to improvise. Despite NEC efforts to provide additional training to polling staff on invalidating ballots, guidelines that ballots should be counted if the intention of the voter is clear were inconsistently applied.
- Furthermore, in some districts, reports of intimidation, including from Paramount Chiefs and secret societies, were of concern. In very cohesive communities, domestic observers and party agents from the local area may not have provided an adequate check to secure against electoral malpractices in the polling stations.

**Tallying of Votes and Announcement of Results.** Votes are currently being tallied at the National Tally Center in Freetown. Accredited political party representatives, domestic and international observers, and journalists are observing the tallying. The NEC plans to announce progressive, cumulative results, and will hold daily press briefings during which it will announce results by constituency as they become available. The NEC plans to announce and certify election results within two weeks of the polls as stipulated in the Electoral Laws Act.

#### **IV. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The delegation acknowledges the continued commitment of the Government of Sierra Leone to ensure that the entire electoral process is conducted fairly, peacefully, and transparently. The following recommendations are offered in the spirit of international cooperation and in the hope of building further confidence in this and future electoral processes.

##### **To Candidates:**

- Candidates should call on their supporters to stay calm and patiently await the official announcement and certification of results.
- If candidates wish to challenge the outcome of the election, they should seek redress through the proper legal mechanisms in accordance with the rule of law.
- Upon conclusion of the electoral process, including the resolution of any complaints that may be lodged, both candidates should publicly accept the results, and encourage their supporters to do the same.

##### **To the National Electoral Commission:**

- The NEC should consolidate the procedures that worked well during these elections, drawing upon the successes of the 2007 elections to reinforce best practices for future elections.
- The NEC should carry out a thorough investigation into complaints or allegations of malfeasance.

##### **To the Supreme Court:**

- The Court should fairly and expeditiously handle any complaints that may arise.

**To the Government of Sierra Leone:**

- The Government of Sierra Leone should ensure that the transfer of power from one democratically elected president to another proceeds peacefully.
- The Government of Sierra Leone should take responsibility for supporting an independent NEC, including providing sustained and adequate funding.
- The Government of Sierra Leone should take steps to ensure that Paramount Chiefs are neutral and impartial during electoral processes.

**To the Sierra Leone Police:**

- The SLP should remain vigilant in the post-election period and continue to work with other stakeholders to maintain peace and order.
- The SLP should reinforce its outreach initiatives to civil society organizations and the media to facilitate a better understanding of citizens' rights and responsibilities.

**To Political Parties:**

- Political parties should create structures that allow them to organize nationally, and ensure that pluralism and tolerance are practiced at all local and regional levels.
- Political parties should consolidate gains made in the galvanizing of grassroots support and the deployment of party agents.
- Parties should actively recruit and support the participation of women and youth in the democratic process, including as candidates in the upcoming local elections.

**To Civil Society:**

- Civil society organizations should draw on their collective experience monitoring the elections to enhance their efforts to advance democratic practices in the post-election period.
- Civil society should continue to work with all stakeholders to discourage the circulation of rumors that may undermine peace and stability in Sierra Leone.

**To the Media:**

- The media should abide by the Media Code of Conduct and provide accurate and balanced reporting on political and electoral processes. This will be particularly important in the period ahead, as results are tabulated, any complaints are resolved, and the electoral outcome is determined.

**To the International Community:**

- The international community should increase its support to Sierra Leone's democratization efforts, assist in further strengthening institutions, and continue to monitor political processes in the country.

**V. THE DELEGATION AND ITS WORK**

NDI's methodology for assessing elections is based on the premise that all aspects of the electoral process must be considered, and that no election can be viewed in isolation from the political context in which it takes place. Among the factors that must be considered are: the legal framework for the elections set by the constitution, including electoral and related laws; the ability of citizens to seek



and receive sufficient and accurate information upon which to make political choices; the ability of political competitors to organize and reach out to citizens in order to win their support; the conduct of the mass media in providing coverage of parties, candidates, and issues; the freedom that citizens and political competitors have to engage in the political and electoral process and make choices without fear of intimidation, violence, or retribution; the conduct of the voter registration process and integrity of the final voters' register; the right to stand for election; the conduct of voting, counting, results tabulation, transmission, and announcement of results; the handling of election complaints; and the installation to office of those duly elected. It should also be noted that no electoral framework is perfect, and all electoral and political processes experience challenges.

The delegation arrived in Freetown on September 3, and held meetings with the two presidential candidates, Sierra Leonean political and civic leaders, electoral authorities, government officials, and representatives of the media, and the international community in Freetown. On September 6, 35 delegates and staff members deployed in 19 teams across Sierra Leone's 14 districts. Prior to the election, the delegation's leadership traveled to Bo district to conduct meetings with NEC and political party officials. On election day, the teams observed voting and counting processes in more than 200 polling stations across 53 parliamentary constituencies. Following the elections, the delegation members returned to Freetown to share their findings and prepare this statement.

In accordance with the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, the delegation cooperated with international election observation missions from the European Union, the Commonwealth Secretariat, ECOWAS, and the AU, as well as with Sierra Leonean nonpartisan domestic election monitoring organizations such as National Election Watch (NEW). The delegation is grateful for the welcome and cooperation it received from voters, election officials, candidates, political party leaders, domestic election observers, and civic activists.

*NDI is a nonprofit organization working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. Calling on a global network of volunteer experts, NDI provides practical assistance to civic and political leaders advancing democratic values, practices, and institutions. NDI has conducted over 100 impartial pre-election, election day, and post-election observation delegations around the globe. NDI's programs in Sierra Leone are funded by the British Department for International Development (DFID), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).*

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

For further information, please contact: in Freetown, Julie Denham at +232 (0) 76 333 730 or [jdenham@ndi.org](mailto:jdenham@ndi.org); in Washington, DC: Beverly Peters at +1 202 728 5545 or [bpeters@ndi.org](mailto:bpeters@ndi.org).