

For Immediate Release

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Press Release

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ECC PRELIMINARY STATEMENT ON THE PRESIDENTIAL RUNOFF

The Liberian people have spoken, their will must be respected

Introduction

The ECC commends Liberians for conducting themselves in a peaceful and orderly manner to vote in the December 26, 2017 run-off election. Voting and counting took place in a transparent manner and the ECC did not observe major incidents that could have undermined the integrity of the process. Despite lower turnout across the country as compared to the first round, the Liberian people have spoken. The ECC encourages the losing party and their supporters to accept the certified results from the NEC as the will of the people. However, if there are concerns or grievances, parties should use dispute resolution mechanisms as set out by the constitution and the new election law.

Between October 20th to December 26, the electoral process was characterized by legal challenges and a prolonged period in resolving the matter, which caused apprehension among Liberians whether or not run off election will be held. It is the view of the ECC that the legal process is a demonstration of citizen trust in the legal system and this has helped to deepen our democracy and strengthen the rule of law. The ECC commends the patience of the Liberian people in waiting for the conclusion of the electoral dispute resolution process.

Of the ECC's 1100 observers, 832 are systematically deployed as Rapid Response Observers, 498 of which are deployed based on a proportional distribution by district. This proportional deployment enables the ECC to comment on the process nationally, drawing on data points from every district of the country. Appendix A provides a detailed breakdown of the distribution of observed polling stations by county.

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On election day, the ECC released a mid-day update on the set-up and opening process. Today's statement focuses on the voting, closing, and counting processes. Figures reported reflect percentages of polling places observed and do not reflect all polling places across the country but do provide credible and reliable data on the electoral process.

This preliminary statement is based on reports that the ECC has received from 494 out of 498 Rapid Response Observers deployed to polling places proportionally nationwide as of 9:00PM on December 27, 2017. The ECC continues to observe the tally process covering all the magistrates and will be issuing a comprehensive final report on the entire electoral process.

Key Findings

Voting Process

ECC observed the entire election day process in the polling places starting with the setup through the counting process and the announcement of the results.

Within their polling places, ECC observers witnessed NEC staff generally following the voting procedures.

- In 99% of polling places observed, voters were always asked to present their voter registration (VR) card before being allowed to vote.
- In 98% of polling places reported that the ballot papers were always stamped before being handed to the voter.
- In 98% of polling places observed, the voting screen was placed in a way that guaranteed the secrecy of the vote.
- The finger of every voter was inked after voting in 99% of observed polling places.

Although 69% of observed polling places had at least two women NEC staff, in 5% of the observed polling places there were no women.

During the first round polls, ECC observers reported that NEC staff experienced challenges in managing queues and directing voters to the proper polling places. This resulted in long waits and frustration among voters, and caused voting and counting to extend long past the official closing time. During the runoff election, observers reported this as not being a significant problem, primarily due to the lower turnout as compared to the first round making the voting precincts less crowded. Additionally, ECC observers reported that the queue controllers were more visible in the voting precincts and were playing their role in directing the voters. Further, ECC observers reports show that the FRR was posted in 99% of the polling places as required by the Supreme Court order. This helped voters to identify their assigned polling place prior to waiting in the queues.

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Final Registration Roll (FRR)**

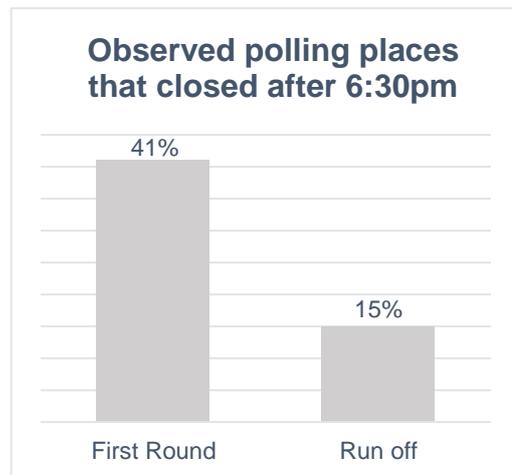


In 33% of polling places observed in the first round, all voters who presented a valid VR card found their names on the Final Registration Roll (FRR). During the second round, 67% of observed polling places did not face any instance of a missing name in the FRR.

In 30% of observed polling places during the second round, between 1 and 9 voters could not find their names on the FRR and in only 3% of polling places observed, 10 or more voters names were missing from the FRR. ECC observers reported that NEC officials largely respected the Supreme Court’s December 7 ruling that mandates that voters whose names were not on the FRR should not be permitted to vote.

Closing and Counting Process

During the first round election, 41% of polling places remained open past the designated closing time (6:00pm). However, during the runoff election, ECC observers reported that 85% of observed polling places closed by 6:00pm while 15% of the observed polling places closed after 6:30pm.



During the first round, ECC observers also noted that some polling places did not have adequate lights. During the runoff election, 98% of ECC observers reported that their polling places had sufficient light during the counting process.

The ECC observers reported that in 99% of the cases the presiding officer showed the marks on the ballot paper to observers and party agents before counting.

In 97% of observed polling places, the Voter Identification Officer recorded the gender of the voters on the Gender Data Capturing Sheet. However, ECC observers reported a general lack of understanding of how to fill the Record of the Count Form.

During the first round, ECC observers noted that the Record of the Count Forms were not systematically posted on the wall of the polling place after the completion of the counting process. During the runoff, 98% of ECC observers reported that the Record of the Count Form was posted on the wall of the polling place.

Reports show that in 90% of the observed voting precincts, security personnel were present during the counting.

Party Agents

On December 26, ECC observers reported the presence of party agents from both the Unity Party (UP) and the Coalition for Democratic Change (CDC) at 99% of observed polling places during the voting and counting processes.

In 5% of observed polling places, party agents filed a complaint. This indicates that party agents did not challenge the counting process in most polling places.

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Conclusion



The ECC recognizes the patience and orderly conduct of the voters in the first and second round, the improvement presence of party agents, security personnel and improved preparedness of the NEC during the second round. However, there is still many lessons to be learned from the 2017 electoral process.

Following the Supreme Court's order, the NEC announced proceeding to cleaning up the FRR from the duplicates. Despite the significant work done on the final voter roll, the ECC is still concerned about the rights of those whose names were not in the initial voter roll. For the first round, the ECC observed widespread instances of voters with valid voter cards but whose names were found to be missing from the FRR which prevented voters from their constitutional right to vote. The ECC assessed the run off election as being peaceful and orderly but it is hard to measure the number of registered voters impacted whose names were not on the FRR.

Recommendations

To the National Election Commission:

- Provide timely updates to the public on the processing of the results.
- If there are any legal challenges to the results, expeditiously adjudicate those complaints.

To political parties and their candidates:

- Demonstrate leadership in supporting a peaceful democratic transition.
- Refrain from announcing results and wait for certified results to be announced by the NEC.
- If there are complaints or petitions, pursue the complaints process as prescribed by the election law.

To the media:

- Demonstrate a high level of professionalism and use your platforms to manage citizen expectations in the process and to promote national reconciliation.

To civil society:

- Continue being neutral in observing the process and demonstrate impartiality and neutrality in observing the remaining aspects of the process.

The ECC pushes to remind Liberians that Liberia is bigger than any Liberian.

About the ECC and Observation of the 2017 Presidential and Legislative Elections

The Elections Coordinating Committee (ECC) is a civil society platform, comprising 30 organizations that observes all aspects of the electoral process in Liberia, including the 2017 Presidential and Legislative elections. The ECC has an eight member steering committee with representatives from Actions for Genuine Democratic Alternatives (AGENDA); Center for Democratic Governance (CDG); Center for Media Studies and Peace Building (CEMESP); Institute for Research and Democratic Development

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(IREDD); National Youth Movement for Transparent Elections – Partners for Democratic Development (NAYMOTE-PADD); West Africa Network for Peace Building (WANEP), Inter-Religious Council of Liberia (IRC) and the Women’s NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL). CDG serves as the chair of ECC.

The ECC works in partnership with the National Democratic Institute (NDI) with support from USAID and OSIWA.

Appendix A: Distribution of observed polling places by county.

County	Distribution of Polling Places		Deployment of ECC Rapid Observers	
	Polling Places	% of Polling Places	Polling Places	% of Polling Places
Bomi	158	2.93%	14	2.81%
Bong	502	9.31%	46	9.24%
Gbarpolu	133	2.47%	13	2.61%
Grand Bassa	388	7.20%	35	7.03%
Grand Cape Mount	171	3.17%	16	3.21%
Grand Gedeh	167	3.10%	15	3.01%
Grand Kru	99	1.84%	9	1.81%
Lofa	417	7.74%	39	7.83%
Margibi	382	7.09%	35	7.03%
Maryland	156	2.89%	15	3.01%
Montserrado	1790	33.21%	166	33.33%
Nimba	699	12.97%	65	13.05%
River Gee	95	1.76%	9	1.81%
Rivercess	97	1.80%	9	1.81%
Sinoe	136	2.52%	12	2.41%
TOTAL	5390	100%	498	100%

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