

**For Immediate Release**

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**ECC STATEMENT ON GBARPOLU DISPUTED ELECTION**

**Introduction**

This statement is based on reports that the Elections Coordinating Committee (ECC) received from four (4) Short Term Observers (STOs) deployed on January 7, 2021 to one precinct having four polling places in Norman Town Precinct 45039, Kongba, electoral district three (3) in Gbarpolu County to observe the postponed election in that district due to violence.

**Key Findings**

Based on reports from four ECC observers deployed to four polling places in Norman Town, Kongba Gbarpolu electoral district 3, the election was conducted in a calm and peaceful environment with low voter turn-out. All polling places opened on time by 8:00 am with NEC deploying on average of 4 officials who were generally men. According to ECC observers, all sensitive voting materials were present but there were no safety measures put in place for the corona virus. There was no hand wash bucket or sanitizers and only few of the NEC officials were seen wearing face mask. It was also reported that there was a moderate presence of security forces in the area between 710 security officials from the LNP, PSU, ERU and Immigration services all of whom were armed.

Observers and Party Agents present included persons from UN Women, ECOWAS, UNDP, Ministries of Justice and Internal Affairs, the Media, LEON and several political parties including CDC, PUP, UPP, etc. According to ECC observers, a total of 9 candidates were on the ballot paper but none of them was present during the voting.

As the process commenced through the day, a brief tension ensued according to ECC observers when citizens from across the border attempted to cross over to vote but was hurriedly put under control by the security personnel present.

### **Voting Process**

All four ECC observers stayed and observed the entire Election Day process at their assigned polling places starting from the set-up, opening and continuing through the voting, closing, counting and tabulation of results. Observers reported using the ECC observation checklist and conveyed their reports through mobile phone calls to the ECC Secretariat.

Within their polling places, ECC observers witnessed NEC staff generally and consistently following voting procedures. NEC officials issued both the Senatorial and Referendum ballots to all voters who were eligible to vote. ECC observers reported that the names of 6 persons who turned out to vote were missing from the list due to multiple registration and disqualification by the NEC. The precinct 45039-Norman Town Hall had the total of 2,021 registered voters out of which only 441 persons successfully voted (266 men, 175 women). Only about 5 voters were reported to require assistance to vote due to illiteracy and were permitted by the NEC officials.

### **Closing and Counting Process**

ECC observes reported that all four observed polling places closed by 6:00 pm with no voter in line about 15 minutes before the official closing time. ECC observers reported that no complaint was filed on the results and that many of the referendum votes were reported to be invalid.

### **COVID-19 Health and Safety Protocol**

While voting process at the Norman Town Hall was reported to be calm and peaceful, observers reported that only few of the NEC officials, observers (international and local) were seen wearing face mask. Voters on the other hand however, generally did not wear face mask, adhere to the social distance protocol or wash hands before voting as it was reported that there was no hand wash bucket or sanitizer present at the voting precinct.

### **Recommendations**

- That the National Election Commission should speedily complete the tallying and announce the results considering the low voter turn-out.
- That any party or candidate who has a grievance with the process or outcome should pursue peaceful redress in keeping with law.



## **About the ECC and Observation of the 2020 Special Senatorial Elections and Referendum**

The Elections Coordinating Committee (ECC) is a civil society platform, comprising of over 30 civil society organizations that observes all aspects of electoral processes in Liberia, including this 2020 Special Senatorial Elections and Referendum. The ECC has a six member steering committee with representatives from Center for Democratic Governance (CDG); Center for Media Studies and Peace Building (CEMESP); Institute for Research and Democratic Development (IREDD); National Youth Movement for Transparent Elections–Partners for Democratic Development (NAYMOTE-PADD); West Africa Network for Peace Building (WANEP) and the Women’s NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL). CDG serves as the chair. ECC remains the largest civil society platform that observes elections in Liberia. It works in partnership with the National Democratic Institute with support from the USAID.