



## **ECOWAS OBSERVER MISSION TO THE 8<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER, 2005 PRESIDENTIAL RUN-OFF ELECTION IN LIBERIA**

### **PRELIMINARY STATEMENT ON THE ELECTION**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In line with the provisions of the ECOWAS Additional Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance and within the framework of ECOWAS electoral assistance to Member-States organizing elections, the Economic Community of West African States deployed a 45-member Mission from 4<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> November to observe the 8<sup>th</sup> November, 2005 Presidential Run-Off Election of Liberia. The Observer Mission was drawn from the Mission that had earlier observed the 11<sup>th</sup> October General Election. It was made up of delegations from Member-States of ECOWAS, the ECOWAS Secretariat, the ECOWAS Parliament and the team of the ECOWAS Special Mediator in Liberia – H.E. General Abdulsalami Abubakar. The Mission was led by Ambassador E.M. Debrah, Member of the ECOWAS Council of Elders.

Just as in the first round elections the ECOWAS team, on arrival in Monrovia, held detailed consultations with the UNMIL Electoral and Security Divisions and other observer missions on security, logistics and coordination. It also received briefing from the Coordination Team on the electoral process as well as their roles, responsibilities and conduct in the process. Thereafter, they were deployed to the electoral districts of the 15 counties of Liberia.

Below, the Mission publishes its preliminary appreciation of the presidential run-off as at the close of the day on Thursday, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2005. The Mission is in the process of compiling a comprehensive report of the entire electoral process, which will be released in due course.

## **PRE-ELECTION OBSERVATION**

### **The Atmosphere**

In contrast to the first round, the political atmosphere in the country on the eve of the election appeared fairly tense. The campaign was more personalized and at times negative. There was less debate on issues and programmes but more on character, personal attributes and affiliations. As expected in an election with just two candidates, the country was virtually polarized into two camps. Realignment of forces amidst horse-trading preoccupied the interregnum between the first round and the run-off. In between the main protagonists of the United Party and the Convention for Democratic Change camps, one could discern a third apathetic group apparently disinterested in the process, either because their candidates had been eliminated in the first round, or they had lost further interest in the process.

Arguments and counter-arguments over the results of the first round and unsubstantiated scepticism about the fairness of the up-coming elections charged the pre-election atmosphere. Predictably, in a country emerging from conflict, there was apprehension about the possibility of violence in the second round. Reassuringly, apart from a few isolated incidents, the campaign process remained generally peaceful, well-organised and controlled. This is a credit to the determination of the Liberian people to close the chapter on violence once and for all.

### **The National Elections Commission (NEC)**

In its report on the conduct of the first round elections, the ECOWAS Observer Mission commended the National Elections Commission (NEC) for the elaborate

and meticulous preparations for the elections. Consequently, the NEC stepped up its preparations for the November 8 election immediately a run-off election became imminent. Efforts were made to stick to the constitutional provisions on the run-off, and also to rectify the lapses noticed in the first round. These include complaints over the meddling of some of the electoral officials in the voting process through providing guidance to voters' and its public education campaign on the elections. These efforts translated into marked improvements on the technical aspects in the conduct of the November 8 run-off election.

### **The Media**

Expectedly, the media was a major agency in the political campaign for the presidential run-off election. The media particularly the mainstream radio Precincts remained professional, and non-partisan in the coverage of the election. The theme of their broadcast was appeal for calm and peaceful campaigns and election. They were preoccupied with public education and enlightenment of the electorate. However, a section of the print media was overly partisan. There is need for the media to exercise caution and display professionalism in the conduct of their work especially in this sensitive period when the general public awaits the election results.

### **Security**

There was adequate security as UNMIL deployed its entire contingent backed by the National Police of Liberia (NPL) in preparations for the election. UNMIL was available in campaign centers without interfering with or intimidating the people.

### **THE CONDUCT OF THE ELECTION**

The preliminary assessment of field reports by the ECOWAS Observer Team from all the counties of the country indicates the following:

### **The Overall Election Process**

- On the whole, the election took place in an atmosphere of calm even though there was tension at some polling precincts observed, as well as isolated scuffles at others.
- The voter turnout was lower compared to the October 11 elections.
- There was less enthusiasm this time round, demonstrated by the slow turnout at several polling precincts. Indeed, queues had vanished at several polling Precincts by 11 a.m.
- Adequate and unobtrusive security was observed at most of the polling precincts.

### **The Voting Process**

- Electoral officials arrived on time at most of the polling Precincts.
- Electoral materials arrived in reasonably good time and in adequate quantities at most of the polling precincts.
- At most of the polling precincts observed, representatives of the two political parties were present.
- Voting commenced on time (at 8 a.m.) at most of the polling Precincts.
- Unlike in the first round, electoral officials adhered to the instruction not to go behind voting screens to assist needy voters.
- However, where the illiterate, the physically challenged and the elderly still needed assistance after elaborate explanations by electoral officials, they were assisted by relatives behind the voting screens.
- Voting was completed by 6 p.m. in all the polling Precincts observed with all registered voters in attendance voting.

### **Counting and Tallying of Votes**

- The counting and tallying of votes were carried out in a transparent manner.
- That voting closed on time at all the polling precincts facilitated the early completion of the tallying process. In a way, this somehow compensated for the absence of electricity.

## **PROBLEMS, SHORTCOMINGS AND CHALLENGES**

Technically, the NEC had prepared its team to ensure the smooth operation of the voting process. On the whole, their performance was commendable. However, a few problems and shortcomings were observed in the course of the voting process. While some of these problems could be attributed to unavoidable circumstances, others resulted from human failings. These include:

### **The Ballot Paper**

In the first round elections, the sheer number of candidates and political parties on the ballot paper confused several voters particularly the illiterate. This led to the invalidation of some ballot papers. In the run-off, there were only two candidates but the incidence of invalid ballots was still prevalent. During the campaign, voters had been repeatedly informed that they were faced with a choice between one female and one male candidate but on the ballot paper, there were four pictures (one female and three males). Thus, despite the vast reduction in the number of candidates on the ballot paper, some of the illiterate voters were still apparently confused.

### **Information on Ballot Papers Provided**

At some polling Precincts observed, electoral officials failed to provide adequate information to party representatives about the total number of rolls of ballot papers at their disposal at the beginning of voting. They only provided this information at the counting and tallying stages. This created suspicion and tension in some polling precincts.

### **Invalidated Ballot Papers**

On the whole, electoral officials scrupulously followed the electoral law in the counting and tallying process. However, on a few occasions, the officials rejected some ballot papers for the fact that a voter had signed on the appropriate column instead of finger-printing, marking or inscribing a sign in

the designated column. These ballot papers were considered invalid. This caused some tension and challenges by aggrieved party representatives.

The ECOWAS Observer Mission is of the view that the shortcomings outlined above demonstrate the peculiar challenges of democratization in a post-conflict society. These problems in no way affect the overall credibility of the election process. The Liberian people were given the opportunity to exercise their democratic right of voting without fear or intimidation. The voting, counting and consolidation of votes were done in a transparent way.

### **PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION**

After the initial debriefing of its members, the ECOWAS Observer Mission's preliminary conclusion on the 8<sup>th</sup> November 2005 run-off Presidential election is that the election was generally peaceful, free, fair and transparent. However, the ECOWAS team notes the complaints arising from the elections and appeals that the due legal process should be the only avenue in handling such complaints to ensure justice and fairness in the entire electoral process.

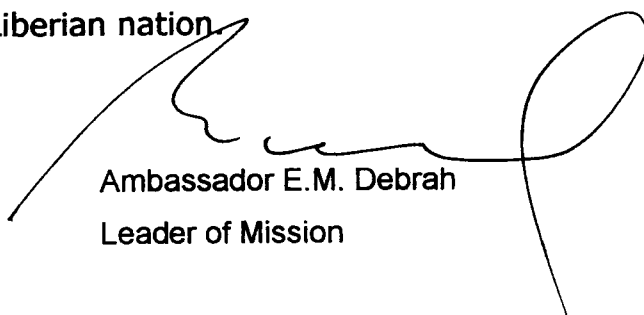
The election is an important but passing phase of the peace process. For many Liberians, the focus is on the mammoth task of national reconstruction-restoration of basic facilities, fixing roads and re-launching the economy. For this to succeed, dialogue, reconciliation and unity are paramount.

While congratulating the political parties and candidates for making the electoral process a success, ECOWAS would like to remind them that elections are not a zero-sum process. The loser should accept the result with dignity and grace; the winner must acknowledge victory with humility and extend a hand of friendship to the other contestants.

ECOWAS commends the Liberian people and the National Transitional Government of Liberia for their determination, positive spirit and commitment

to the democratic process. ECOWAS also wishes to commend all those institutions, local and international, who have worked tirelessly to ensure the holding of successful run-off presidential election. This election and the previous one (the 11<sup>th</sup> October general election) constitute remarkable landmarks in the process of achieving peace, stability, security and democracy in Liberia.

We urge the two political parties, candidates, their supporters and the entire Liberian people to remain calm and await the final result of the election. It is important that the election and its outcome must foster national reconciliation, unity, stability and a re-birth of the Liberian nation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and curves, positioned above the printed name and title.

Ambassador E.M. Debrah

Leader of Mission

**Monrovia, Liberia, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2005**