



COMMONWEALTH OBSERVER GROUP

Sierra Leone run-off Presidential Election

8 September 2007

News Release

Interim statement by the Commonwealth observer team for the run-off election

09 September 2007, Freetown, Sierra Leone

In our arrival statement issued on 04 September 2007 we indicated our intention to deploy members of our team to the major provinces to observe the elections. The deployed observers have now returned to Freetown. Their impressions of the elections of 08 September are essentially the same as that noted in our departure statement of 18 August 2007.

On Election Day, we observed the opening of the polls and witnessed the polling process in as many stations as possible. We watched the closing of the polls, the counting process and the post counting exercise in several polling stations.

In some centres, the opening of the polls was delayed. This was caused by arguments over the legality of the admission credentials of some party polling agents. Nonetheless, this did not affect the quality of the voting process. Once these hiccups were cleared, voting progressed smoothly.

The post 11 August political situation especially the rivalry between the two competing political parties engendered suspicion and over-enthusiasm in the attitude of party supporters. At some polling stations, party polling agents and supporters alleged that some polling staff were in collusion with opposing polling party agents. For this reason, some voters refused to leave polling centres after voting and hanged around. This caused the police to call for armed soldiers to disband them. Thus, in some polling centres, the security presence was highly visible but not obtrusive. They did not in anyway interfere with the voting process.

Once again, the National Electoral Commission (NEC) displayed competence, even-handedness, integrity and transparency throughout the entire exercise. The changes introduced by NEC for the run-off

election were successfully implemented. Instructing polling staff to vote not before but after the general public eased the voting process. Generally NEC officials learnt from the experiences of 11 August to improve the quality of performance.

The counting process followed the laid down procedure. This time around, counting took less time because of the fact that it was only one election, and the processes which polling officials had to undertake on 11 August was cut by half.

The Commonwealth observer team salutes the people of Sierra Leone for their steadfast commitment to the maintenance of peace and the consolidation of democratic ethics in their country.

Overall, we found the exercise to be generally fair, credible and transparent.

On behalf of the Commonwealth Secretary-General, we commend the people of Sierra Leone for their commitment to and support for democracy.

Note to editors: The Commonwealth Team is based at Cape Sierra Hotel. For further enquiries contact Yvonne Apea on 076-323119.