



Европейски парламент Parlamento Europeo Evropský parlament Europa-Parlamentet Europäisches Parlament
Euroopa Parlament Ευρωπαϊκό Κοινοβούλιο European Parliament Parlement européen Parlaimint na hEorpa
Europski parlament Parlamento europeo Eiropas Parlaments Europos Parliamentas Európai Parlament
Parlament Ewropew Europees Parlement Parliament Europejski Parlamento Europeu Parlamentul European
Európsky parlament Evropski parlament Euroopan parlamentti Europaparlamentet

ELECTION OBSERVATION DELEGATION TO THE PRESIDENTIAL, PARLIAMENTARY AND LOCAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS IN SIERRA LEONE

(07 March 2018)

**Report by
Neena Gill CBE, Chair of the EP Delegation**

Annexes:

A. List of participating MEPs

B. European Parliament Election Observation Delegation Statement

Introduction:

Following an invitation from the Sierra Leone authorities and the subsequent authorisation of the Conference of Presidents, a six member EP delegation travelled to Sierra Leone to observe the 2018 presidential, parliamentary and local council elections. The delegation followed a programme in the country from 4 to 9 March 2018 and was integrated into the EU Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) led by Chief Observer Jean Lambert (Greens/EFA, UK). The EP delegation was chaired by Neena Gill CBE (S&D, UK), and was also composed of Frank Engel (EPP, Lux), Claudia Schmidt (EPP, AT), Joachim Zeller (EPP, DE), Norbert Neuser (EPP, DE) and Jordi Solé (Greens/EFA, ES).

The context of the 2018 elections:

Sierra Leone is one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world, a situation exacerbated by the civil war which lasted from 1991 to 2002. It cost around 50,000 lives and led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. The authorities subsequently faced the huge challenge of reintegrating the former combatants, many of whom had been child soldiers and a large population which had suffered physical mutilation. The Ebola epidemic in 2014 led to further loss of life. It is estimated that 81.4% of the population lives in poverty on less than \$3.10 a day. The economy is heavily dependent on extractive industries and is therefore vulnerable to volatile international prices. Moreover, there is significant corruption and unsustainable management of human resources.

Nevertheless there has been substantial progress in the strengthening of human rights, despite the need for further advancement in areas such as gender equality, tackling female genital mutilation and the prohibition of homosexuality - issues which have been addressed in European Parliament resolutions.

Since independence in 1961, power in the country has alternated between two political parties: the predominantly northern based All People's Congress (APC) and the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) with its main support in the south. In the previous presidential elections in 2012, the incumbent President Ernest Bai Koroma of the APC won a second term with 58% of the vote in the first round, defeating the main opposition candidate, retired Brigadier Julius Maada Bio of the SLPP who obtained 37%. On this occasion there had also been both an EU EOM and an EP delegation.

President Koroma was constitutionally ineligible from standing for election a third time, although he planned to remain as President of his party. In consultation with the APC's National Advisory Council, he had selected the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Samura Kamara as the party's presidential candidate out of a total of 28 contenders, prompting accusations that internal party democracy had been bypassed.

The SLPP once again selected Julius Maada Bio as its candidate for the 2018 elections. This provoked dissent within the party, leading to splits and some prominent figures forming new political groupings, such as the National Grand Coalition (NGC) which was headed by Yumkella Kandeh (a former Under Secretary of the United Nations). The NGC was reported

to have the potential to become a significant third force in the country, particularly in Freetown.

In total there were 16 candidates for the presidential elections, all representing a political party (although some observers commented that politics tended to be based on personalities or tribal/regional loyalties and not on policies). In order to become president in the first round a candidate needed to obtain over 55% of the votes cast and - if this did not take place - there would be a second round between the two leading candidates.

The departure of President Koroma and the prospect of a transition of power for the second time since the end of the civil war left the country at a political crossroads. The elections would also be the first since the civil war in which there would be no United Nations military presence. This led to some uncertainty amid hopes that a smooth electoral process would lead to the consolidation of democracy and peace.

The legal framework was almost identical to that of the 2012 elections, including the same shortcomings. These included a ban on independent candidates for the presidency; a legal requirement for public servants to resign twelve months before elections in order to stand as candidates; and the lack of timely remedies for electoral complaints and appeals.

The National Electoral Commission (NEC) was nevertheless reported to have overcome a number of difficulties (systemic underfunding, an extremely compressed timeframe and mounting political pressure) and had succeeded in carrying out a challenging voter registration exercise, which had established a register of 3,178,663 voters. It was reported that all parties saw the NEC as being impartial.

The EU EOM reported that the elections were likely to be competitive thanks to the wide choice of candidates and a high probability that no presidential candidate would reach the 55% threshold for victory in the first round. It considered that the conditions were in place for a technically well-conducted election. Nevertheless, it expressed regret that only two of the 16 presidential candidates and only 11% of MPs were female (a proportion that was likely to decrease after the elections).

Media freedoms were guaranteed in the constitution and the media was generally considered to be pluralistic and independent, despite reports of self-censorship and polarisation. The radio was the most popular media, as only 16% of the population had access to the internet and there was a reported illiteracy rate of 47%.

Despite some tension there were strong indications that all sides were keen to ensure that there should be no recurrence of the violent conflict that had plagued the country in the 1990s. Indeed, all parties stressed that reconciliation had been a success and many regarded the conflict not as a civil war but as violence that had been imported from neighbouring countries. The process of reconciliation was reported to have been helped by the widespread religious tolerance in Sierra Leone (a country where - among other symbolic features - "Mohammad" was a name given to Christian children!) Most observers did not consider the army to be an instrument of the ruling party, however there had been charges that the police were not even-handed in their treatment of governing and opposition parties.

Most EU aid is channelled through the European Development Fund (EDF) which totals €376 from 2014 to 2020. EU aid (via the EIDHR) included support to the National Election Watch (NEW) an umbrella civil society group with over 300 member organisations, which sought to broaden the (already strong) role of civil society in the democratic process. This included training domestic monitors and observing the boundary delimitation process.

The EU EOM with around 100 long and short term observers was the largest observer mission in Sierra Leone. Others present were the Commonwealth, the African Union, and the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Carter Center.

European Parliament programme

In the first part of the programme, the MEPs received briefings from the EU Heads of Mission and the EU EOM core team. These covered the political landscape, the legal electoral framework, the security environment and the media situation in Sierra Leone. Meetings also took place with the leaders or their representatives of political parties (including the leading opposition candidate Julius Maada Bio) members of the National Election Commission (NEC), the National Election Watch (NEW) and other civil society organisations. It was intended that each station would have an observer from NEW. Full details of the programme are appended.

The chair of the delegation also met the incumbent President Ernest Bai Koroma in which - inter alia - he expressed concerns about the theft of ballot papers and stated that he was awaiting an explanation from the NEC. The President also noted that there had been significant irregularities in previous elections in which the SLPP had won. He stressed that he wanted to leave a legacy of establishing a truly democratic state with an outcome that everyone could accept.

Many of the interlocutors expressed a strongly stated commitment to building a democratic society free from corruption. Talks also indicated that there was broad support for a strengthening of the EU-Sierra Leone relationship.

Election Day

The EP delegation split into three teams on Election Day, travelling to Freetown, the Sierra Leone Peninsula, and Bo in the south of the country (the final destination necessitated two overnight stays). Nationwide there were 3,300 polling stations (an increase of 10% since 2012). Tallying took place in five regional capitals.

The EP delegation considered that the many positive elements of Election Day were particularly impressive in view of the short time frame to prepare for the elections. It was struck by the generally peaceful atmosphere in which Election Day took place, with the

voters displaying great patience as they waited in long queues. They also commended the work of the domestic observers, the National Election Commission and the polling station staff who generally displayed impressive professionalism and commitment.

They particularly applauded the women of Sierra Leone – both the voters and the polling station staff - for their commitment to the electoral process. Nevertheless they deeply regretted that only two of the presidential candidates were women and that there were indications that the proportion of women in the new parliament would decrease further.

MEPs were also concerned at the presence in and around some polling stations of a number of representatives of political parties who appeared on occasions to be directing the proceedings – in particular the management of access to the stations. The delegation stressed that the guidelines on the roles of party representatives and polling centre staff - both inside and outside polling centres - should be more well-defined.

MEPs also noted that the procedures or practices in a number of polling stations, such as double checking of identification documents and management of queues, were cumbersome and delayed the processing of voters, leading to a build-up of the queues outside the stations. They considered that a streamlining of these procedures and practices would allow officials to administer the vote more efficiently. Finally they were also concerned about the difficulties of access to many polling stations for the elderly and people with disabilities and called for this issue to be addressed.

In general the EU EOM noted a number of procedural shortcomings, although these were not judged to have had a significant impact on the integrity of the voting process. Observers assessed voting as “good” or “very good” in 95% of polling stations, while closing and counting was assessed as “good or “very good” in 85% of cases.

Press conference and the EU EOM preliminary statement

Prior to the press conference there was – at the specific request of the MEPs – an informal meeting with parliamentarians from other observer delegations (ECOWAS and the Pan African Parliament). **This meeting was regarded by all concerned as very useful and to be repeated on future election observation missions, with possible more structured collaboration.**

The EU EOM and EP press conference took place on 9 March 2018. The EP fully endorsed the conclusions of the EU EOM and the comments made by the Chief Observer on the pre-election period. The Head of the EP delegation stressed that in the last quarter century Sierra Leone had experienced many tragedies but it was hoped that it was “now on the path to a brighter and more stable future”.

Looking towards a second round the MEPs called on all parties to resolve any disputes in a peaceful manner and to ensure that there was a smooth transition of power from President Koroma to his successor. They stressed the full commitment of the European Parliament to supporting Sierra Leone along its democratic path and to developing the relationship after the election process.

Post-Election Day developments

SLPP candidate, retired Brigadier Julius Maada Bio, gained 43.3% and Dr Samura Kamara of the incumbent APC obtained 42.7% of the votes cast

The third biggest vote in the first round went to Yumkella Kandeh of the NGC) and in fourth place was Sam Sumana-Samuel of the Coalition for Change (C4C) party. In fifth place was Mansary Mohamed (Alliance Democratic Party, ADP).¹

As no candidate had obtained over 55% of the vote a second round was required which eventually took place on 31 March 2018. The EU EOM remained in the country to observe this second round although the EP Delegation was not present. SLPP candidate Bio obtained 51.8% of the vote (1,319,406 votes) defeating APC candidate Kamara who obtained 48.2% of the vote (1,227,171).

¹ The eleven other candidates each received 0.5% or less of the vote. These were Musa Tarawally (Citizens' Democratic Party, CDP), Mohamed Bah (National Democratic Alliance, NDA), Patrick O'Dwyer (National Progressive Democrats, NPC), Jonathan Patrick Sandy (National Unity and Reconciliation Party, NURP), Kandah Baba Conteh (Peace and Liberation Party, PLP), Charles Francis Margai (People's Movement for Democratic Change, PMDC), Bresford Victor Williams (Republican National Independence Party, RNIP), Gbandi Jemba Ngobeh (Revolutionary United Front, RUF), Mohamed Sowa-Turay (United Democratic Movement, UDM), Saa Henry Kabuta (United National People's Party, UNPP) and Femi Claudius Cole (Unity Party, UP).¹

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

ELECTION OBSERVATION DELEGATION

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN TIMOR LESTE

08 March 2018

Members

1. Neena GILL CBE, S&D, United Kingdom - Chair
2. Frank ENGEL, EPP, Luxembourg
3. Joachim ZELLER, EPP, Germany
4. Claudia SCHMIDT, EPP, Austria
5. Norbert NEUSER, S&D, Germany
6. Jordi SOLÉ, Greens/EFA, Spain

Annex

**Statement by Ms Neena Gill CBE,
Head of the European Parliament election observation delegation
to the Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Council elections in Sierra Leone,
7 March 2018**

Freetown, 9 March 2018

Ladies and gentlemen, fellow parliamentarians,

Thank you first of all for the great interest that you have shown in this press conference.

As Chair of the European Parliament's delegation, I have the honour of speaking on behalf of myself and my five fellow MEPs. We are members of the only directly elected body of the EU, representing 500 million European citizens. Our Parliament has been involved in election observation for over 30 years and has deployed more than 170 short term election observation delegations. These delegations – like those of other observer teams - play a significant role in promoting the legitimacy of and public confidence in the electoral process across the world.

Since our arrival in Sierra Leone we have met candidates and other representatives of many of the political parties, with the National Election Commission, the media, and with civil society, including domestic and international observers. I also had the honour of meeting the President, H.E. Ernest Bai Koroma. And, of course, we observed Election Day from start to finish.

The European Parliament delegation fully supports the preliminary findings and conclusions of the EU Election Observation Mission. I would also like to express my appreciation of the excellent work carried out by my colleague, Ms Jean Lambert, the EOM Chief Observer, and her team.

The Chief Observer has already given a thorough overview of the Mission's preliminary findings and I therefore wish to focus on a few issues relating both to Election Day and what we discussed during our earlier meetings.

On Election Day we divided into three teams and observed in a large number of polling stations. We were impressed by the generally peaceful atmosphere in which Election Day took place, with the citizens - young and old, women and men - showing great patience as they waited in long queues, in some cases for many hours. They are an example to us in Europe. We also commend the work of the domestic observers, the National Election Commission and the polling station staff who generally displayed impressive professionalism and commitment.

And having yesterday celebrated International Women's Day, I particularly want to applaud the women of Sierra Leone – both the voters and the polling station staff - for their commitment to the electoral process. It is a matter of deep regret that only two of the presidential candidates are women and also that there are indications that it is probable that the proportion of women in the new parliament will decrease. This disappointing trend should be reversed.

So, we welcome the many positive elements of Election Day which are all the more impressive given the short time frame to prepare for the elections. However, there are a couple of issues that I urge the Sierra Leone authorities to address.

Firstly, we were concerned at the presence in and around some polling stations of a number of representatives of political parties. These individuals appeared on occasions to be directing the proceedings – in particular the management of access to the polling stations. We strongly believe that there should be no confusion between the roles of party representatives and polling centre staff - both inside and outside polling centres. Moreover, there must be more clearly enforced guidelines on what the role of these party representatives should actually be.

Secondly, we noted that the procedures or practices in a number of polling stations, such as double checking of identification documents and management of queues, were cumbersome and delayed the processing of voters, leading to a build-up of the queues outside the stations. A streamlining of these procedures and practices would allow officials to administer the vote more efficiently.

We were also concerned about the access to many polling stations for the elderly and people with disabilities. We acknowledge the long term challenges of developing the necessary infrastructure but we believe that this is an issue that must be addressed.

However, an election is not simply about what happens on one day. And once again I fully endorse the comments made by the Chief Observer on the pre-election period.

In the last quarter century Sierra Leone has experienced many tragedies but we hope that it is now on the path to a brighter and more stable future.

The coming weeks will be critical as we wait for the results and look towards a possible second round. It is vital that all parties resolve any disputes in a peaceful manner and that there is a smooth transition of power from President Koroma to his successor.

For our part the European Parliament is totally committed to supporting Sierra Leone along its democratic path and you can rely fully on us. We stand ready and look forward to developing our relations after the election process is over.

Thank you for your attention.