



INFORMATION NOTE

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From the Communication Officer

Women electoral observers in Liberia announce massive turnout and peaceful process in free and fair elections Incumbent President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's Unity Party is leading at the polls after free, fair, transparent, and nonviolent elections; a provisional run-off election is set for November 8, 2011.

With almost all the ballots counted, Mrs Johnson Sirleaf gained the most votes but failed to pass the 50% threshold needed for outright victory. According to the National Elections Commission (NEC), with 96% of the vote counted, she has 44% of the vote against 32% for her leading challenger, former UN Diplomat Mr Winston Tubman. Electoral turnout was 71%.

President Johnson Sirleaf says she is happy to be facing an election run-off against former UN diplomat Winston Tubman, having made clear that she welcomed competition but was confident of victory. While the NEC has announced that final results will be available on October 26, "*a run-off is imminent,*" said Hon. James Fromayah from the NEC. This run-off election has provisionally been set for 8 November. The leading challenger, Mr Tubman, says he will contest the run-off.

International and local election observers said that the election, which took place last Tuesday, October 11, was peaceful, and there were no major breaches in voting nor serious incidents of violence. These observers included numerous women from the countries of Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, who were deployed as firsthand elections observers by Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS) as part of its peacebuilding and conflict resolution activities in the Mano River Region. Through this initiative, women actively participate in the electoral and peace building processes in accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325.

This Electoral Observation initiative is the result of collaboration between FAS, the Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET) and the Angie Brooks International Center for Women's Empowerment, Leadership Development, International Peace and Security (ABIC) to encourage women's broad-ranging and active participation in electoral processes in the region. This joint effort goes hand in hand with FAS's Regional Action Plan for Implementation of UNSCR 1325, reinforcing regional cooperation efforts that encourage solidarity among women of the region to take an active role in their politics and governance, and increase awareness about the many ways in which women can get involved in the politics of peace and conflict resolution.

MARWOPNET, ABIC and FAS trained over 130 national and international observers, who were deployed in and reported from 9 counties across the country. While in the field, the observers were supported by the MARWOPNET/ABIC/FAS Situation Room set up to monitor the electoral developments and results in real time. It was staffed throughout the day and most of the night by experienced, eminent and knowledgeable personalities who could advise observers on issues emerging during the course of the election, immediately report any concerns to the NEC, and resolve every reported incident appropriately. Furthermore, a toll-free number was established and advertised so that all individuals would be able to easily call and anonymously report any irregularities they may have witnessed.



As the process continues MARWOPNET, ABIC and FAS have noted the

- patience and passionate commitment of the electorate to exercise their franchise despite the downpour of rain;
- compliance with the constitutional provisions and the electoral laws
- punctual start and close of the polls,
- widespread availability of polling materials and equipment,
- calm and friendly atmosphere at almost all precincts,
- accessibility of polling places
- professionalism and helpfulness of the NEC staff and security officers; and the
- patriotism and neutrality of the vast majority of the media.

Based on the above and on the preliminary findings of our observers, MARWOPNET, ABIC and FAS congratulate the NEC, all the political parties and independent candidates and most importantly the people of Liberia for the peaceful and orderly way these elections were conducted. Our preliminary findings indicate a massive turnout and that the process was generally free and fair, providing the Liberian people with the opportunity to exercise their rights to choose their leaders without fear. There were no reports of violence anywhere and as the counting continues, MARWOPNET, ABIC and FAS have not come across any major challenge that would change the peaceful nature this process has witnessed.

MARWOPNET, ABIC and FAS are deeply encouraged by the full involvement of young people in the electoral process as poll workers, party agents, elections observers, media practitioners, security personnel and voters, which is a credit to Liberia and a hopeful sign of a brighter future for the entire Mano River sub-region. Interestingly, these young people were not just enthusiastic to participate in the electoral process but comported themselves in a mature and responsible manner, setting a positive example for youth all across the sub-region.

MARWOPNET, ABIC and FAS are also encouraged by the increase in the number of female electoral staff over past elections, although further efforts should be made by NEC to ensure more women staff especially in the rural voting precincts in future elections.

Another important observation from our observers is that the voting process was slow, which when combined with the rain caused long queues in many areas. However, this time taken was necessary in order to ensure that every voter had the opportunity to vote freely and select correctly the candidate of their choice. Therefore, in the view of MARWOPNET, ABIC and FAS, this was time well spent.

Concern was also expressed at the slow pace of the counting process. This was caused by electoral staff strictly adhering to NEC's regulations to ensure transparency and credibility of the count and the result. The fact that we have not heard any report that any tally sheet was rejected by a party agent or observer is further confirmation of the credibility of the elections process.

This is Liberia's second election since the end of a horrific 14-year civil war in 2003. Incumbent President Johnson Sirleaf shared last week's Nobel Peace Prize for her nonviolent struggle on behalf of women and for helping maintain peace in Liberia since she took office nearly six years ago. "*We want to thank the Liberian people,*" President Johnson Sirleaf told the BBC's Network Africa programme following the election.

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