



November 10, 2011

Press Statement

By the Joint Mano River Women Peace Network (MARWOPNET), Angie Brooks International Centre (ABIC), Femmes Africa Solidarite (FAS), Coalition of Women and Youth Observation Team on the November 8, 2011 Presidential Runoff Election in Liberia

After closely following the political developments in Liberia, the Mano River Women Peace Network (MARWOPNET), the Angie Brooks International Centre for Women's Empowerment, Leadership Development, International Peace and Security (ABIC) and Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS) formed a partnership to observe and report on the 2011 General Elections in Liberia. Our objectives also included ensuring women's full participation in the process in line with the United Nations Security Council (UNSCR) 1325.

Prior to the October 11, 2011 (1st Round) elections, MARWOPNET, ABIC and FAS, together with a coalition of women and youth groups, held buildup activities including consultations with key stakeholders and international partners such as various political parties, government agencies, youth and student groups, the President of the ECOWAS commission, His Excellency Victor Gbeho as well as joint special envoys of President Goodluck Jonathan, Chairman of ECOWAS; H. E. John Kufuor, Former President of the Republic of Ghana and H. E. General Abdulsalami Abubakar, Former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, to advocate for peaceful and violence-free polls.

Through this partnership, over 100 national and international observers were trained, who monitored and reported on the conduct of the elections in 9 out of the 15 political subdivisions of Liberia. It is worth noting that about 95% of those observers were female. Based on the reports from our observers plus the support provided by our 'Situation Room' that was staffed throughout the day and most of the night by experienced, eminent and knowledgeable personalities, we impartially reported on October 13, 2011 that the process was generally FREE, FAIR and TRANSPARENT and provided the Liberian people with the opportunity to exercise their rights to choose their leaders without FEAR.

On October 25, 2011, the National Elections Commission announced the final results of the elections and named the two parties to the Runoff Election on November 8, 2011. FAS-ABIC-MARWOPNET observers consolidated their efforts by bringing on board several women's organizations, youth and student groups to advocate for 100% non-violence throughout the electoral process. The team continued consulting with stakeholders and partners and called mediatory meetings with officials of both parties in an effort to calm down the heightening tension. Other efforts were also made to bring together the two parties to discuss how the elections could be non-violent. We tried to meet the Chairmen and Standard Bearers of both parties and used both the print and electronic media to communicate with Liberian citizens on the constitutional provision regarding elections. Every measure was used to ensure a transparent runoff election and that the two runoff parties participated for the sake of peace in Liberia.

As part of our plan to ensure a peaceful, free and fair election, we deployed our over 100 observers in the field to monitor the process. Again, let us emphasize that 95% of these Observers were women. These Observers were supported by a MARWOPNET, ABIC and FAS

'Situation Room' that was staffed throughout the day and most of the night by experienced, eminent and knowledgeable personalities who were able to advise observers on issues emerging during the course of the election, relay concerns to NEC and resolve every reported incident appropriately. MARWOPNET, ABIC and FAS have also closely followed the activities and initial reports by other observer teams including ECOWAS and AU.

As the process continues we have noted the following:

- a. During the morning hours, the voter turnout was extremely low but it picked up later in the day.
- b. There was an attempt to have gender-disaggregated data at polling stations
- c. Young men and women served as polling officials and knew the electoral processes.
- d. There were no long queues at polling stations
- e. Monrovia had a strong security presence of the UN and Liberia National Police
- f. In spite of the unfortunate incident of November 7, 2011, women and men were able to move and vote peacefully.

Based on the above and on the preliminary findings of our observers, we congratulate the NEC, and all the people of Liberia, who, peacefully turned out to cast their ballots for the candidate of their choice.

Our preliminary findings indicate that turn-out was low compared to the October 8, 2011 Elections. We attribute this turnout to the following factors:

1. Some Liberians heeded to the call of the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) to boycott the process.
2. Others, out of fear that violence might erupt during the voting process, chose to stay away and avoid being harm if violence erupted.
3. Many voters were trucked to various polling places during the first round by Legislative candidates of different political parties who wanted their votes. This opportunity was not available this time around. As a result, those voters who lacked the means to transport themselves were forced to stay away from the process.
4. In Monrovia a few polling stations had to be relocated due to the threat of violence.

ABIC, MARWOPNET and FAS are pleased to announce that the process was generally FREE, FAIR and TRANSPARENT and once again provided the Liberian people with the opportunity to choose their leaders. There were no reports of violence anywhere and as the counting continues, we would like to appeal to Liberians to remain peaceful.

Like the first round, we are again deeply encouraged by the full involvement of young women and men in the electoral process as poll workers, party agents, election observers, security personnel and voters, which is a sign that Liberia is moving towards gender equality and women's empowerment. In fact, at a polling place at the E. Jonathan Goodrich Center in Bardnersville area, all the electoral staff were female.

In conclusion, we express sincere gratitude to all our partners and sponsors including UNDP and the government of Norway for their support, without which this election observation exercise would not have been possible.

Finally, ABIC, MARWOPNET, FAS and the Coalition of Women and Youth call on all Liberians to accept the final outcome of this election, engage in activities of reconciliation and to avoid any action or statement that will in any way detract from what Liberians have built together so far.