



EUROPEAN UNION
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PRESIDENTIAL, PARLIAMENTARY AND LOCAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS

LIGHT POLICING “A GOOD SIGN FOR A PEACEFUL ELECTION”, EU EOM CHIEF OBSERVER SAYS

Freetown, 25 October 2012

Following the first phase of electioneering for the forthcoming Sierra Leone elections, the light policing at campaign rallies has been described as "*a good sign for a peaceful election*" by the Chief Observer of the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) to Sierra Leone, Richard Howitt. EU Chief Observer made these comments today in a live television interview on the public broadcaster SLBC, following Mr Howitt's return to Freetown from his field trip to Kenema.

After having personally witnessed rallies by the governing APC party in the East and by the opposition SLPP in the Western Rural district of the country, EU Chief Observer commented that the light presence of security forces in the rallies he had observed and reported also by the EU's 28 long-term observers already located throughout the country, so far contributes to a general perception of peaceful and violent-free elections at the start of the campaign. "*The visible presence of relatively few police on the street during campaign rallies and the fact they have largely been unarmed I regard as a good sign of the confidence of all involved that the campaign can be orderly and violence-free*", Mr Howitt said.

"Although the majority of interlocutors I have spoken with concern that violence could erupt, I am glad to see that so far the various political parties and their supporters we have witnessed have managed to conduct campaign activities and celebrate their gatherings without confrontations and in a peaceful environment", Chief Observer stated.

During his visit to Kenema EU EOM's Chief Observer travelled to the remote village of Tiloma in order to assess the level of awareness of the rural population about the elections. Mr Howitt also met with six Paramount Chiefs, who expressed their wish to have peaceful and democratic elections, and received also the impressions by different civil society groups about the preparations of the 17 November polls in Kenema.

"The fact I have personally travelled North, South, East and West in the country and that our observers are deployed in each one of the country's 14 districts will give confidence that the European Union is observing across the whole country", Chief Observer concluded.

For further information or interview requests with the EU Chief Observer, please contact **Javier Gutierrez, EU EOM's Press and Public Outreach Officer** Mobile: +232 (0)79 250 959 E-mail: javier.gutierrez@eueomsierraleone.eu