



EUROPEAN UNION
ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION

General Elections – Sierra Leone
24 June 2023



Voters' commitment to a democratic process challenged by violence and lack of transparency at critical stages of elections

Freetown, 26 June 2023

Press Release - For Immediate Release

Chief Observer Evin Incir, Member of the European Parliament, presented the preliminary statement of the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) to Sierra Leone on the 24 June general elections.

“We commend voter’s dedication and resolve to exercise their democratic right and to cast their ballots. Citizen observers, who deployed their teams to all polling centres on election day positively contributed to the transparency, while the introduction of the 30 per cent gender quota for party lists enhanced women participation in political life,” said the Chief Observer Evin Incir.

The EU EOM notes that the Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone (ESCL) appeared operationally prepared until delays and omissions in the delivery of sensitive materials occurred on election day with reasons not being properly explained. *“Throughout the electoral process, the ECSL lacked clear, timely and comprehensive communication with the broader public, creating uncertainties and reducing stakeholders’ trust. Considering the highly polarised political environment, it is crucial to ensure full transparency and unimpeded access of observers to critical stages of the tabulation of results,”* said the Chief Observer Evin Incir.

The 2023 elections were conducted under the revised electoral framework. Positively, legal reforms followed broad stakeholder consultations, in line with international good practice. The ECSL registered candidates for all races in an inclusive process. In total 13 candidates contested the presidential election; some 877 stood for parliamentary elections, among whom 32 per cent were women. With no caps on campaign donations or expenditures, better-off candidates had a clear advantage in all races, while the misuse of incumbency hampered the playing field.

At the start of the campaign, freedom of movement, assembly and expression were largely respected, but closer to election day, politically-motivated attacks shrank the space of political participation in several districts. Disproportionate use of force by security agencies heightened tensions, while divisive content circulating on social media stirred discord. Positively, national fact-checking initiative *iVerify* vigorously countered disinformation, and media debates in all districts helped voters to make informed choices. However, a national presidential debate did not happen.

“I would like to send a message to the leaders and people of Sierra Leone. Over the past 21 years, you have built a hard-won peace. Considering the latest developments, we call on all stakeholders to deal with any disputes arising from the electoral process peacefully, using available legal avenues” said Georgios Kyrtos, Head of Delegation of Members of European Parliament.

The mission has been present in Sierra Leone since 11 May and will continue to observe tabulation of results. The EU EOM will present and publish its final report, including recommendations for improving the electoral framework in the next few months.

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