



I. INTRODUCTION

1. On 10 October 2023, the people of Liberia went to the polls to elect a President, 15 Senators and 73 House of Representative members. This year's general elections, the fourth to be conducted successively since 2005, constitute a significant milestone in the consolidation of peace and democracy in Liberia, two decades after the end of the civil war. They are also the first polls to be independently organized by the Liberian authorities.
2. Consistent with the provisions of Articles 12 and 13 of the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, which mandate the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to provide assistance to member States conducting elections, the ECOWAS Commission:
 - Deployed an Exploratory Mission to Liberia from 15 to 19 February 2023.
 - Deployed a Pre-election Fact-finding Mission, jointly conducted with the African Union (AU) Commission from 23 to 29 July 2023;
 - Provided capacity building for stakeholders on Dialogue and Mediation;
 - Conducted Experience-Sharing Engagement with Security Forces to Enhance Election Security in Liberia from 13-16 September 2023;
 - Engaged the Media and CSOs to enhance participatory democracy and the management of media space to address fake news, misinformation and disinformation in the period leading to, during and after the polls;
 - Provided logistics support, including the procurement of four 4X4 Wheel vehicles, a batch of computer, IT and office equipment to the National Elections Commission (NEC) to support its operations;
 - Provided Technical Experts and Resource Persons to support the NEC's ICT infrastructure for the compilation and publication of results;



- Provided financial assistance to the tune of USD 500,000 to the NEC to support preparation towards the elections.
3. The purpose of the Joint ECOWAS-African Union Pre-election Fact-finding Mission was to assess the state of preparedness of the NEC and other critical stakeholders. In particular, the Joint Mission held discussions with the Chair and board members of the National Elections Commission (NEC), political parties, including the Coalition for Democratic Change (CDC), Unity Party (UP) and Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDA), civil society organizations and representatives of Diplomatic Missions and the international development partners.
 4. Based on the recommendations of the Mission, the ECOWAS Commission deployed appropriate preventive diplomacy and electoral assistance measures, including the facilitation of an Experience-Sharing Engagement with Security Forces to enhance the capacities of the joint election security taskforce with a view to deepening election security management before, during and after the polls. Further, the Commission organized an interactive workshop on dialogue and mediation for political actors and stakeholders on peaceful elections. The Commission also engaged targeted media professionals operating in the print, broadcast and online spaces, with the aim of strengthening their capacity in addressing the challenges of incitement, fake news, disinformation, misinformation and mal-information, through fact-checking mechanisms.
 5. In the build up to the 10 October 2023 election, and in furtherance of the provisions of Articles 14 to 16 of the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001), the President of the ECOWAS Commission, **His Excellency Dr. Omar Alieu Touray**, deployed a 15-member Long Term Observa-



- tion Team (LTO) from 10 September 2023 to 15 October 2023. He then deployed a Short Term Election Observation Mission (STEOM), comprising 120 observers to Liberia. The Mission is led by **Professor Attahiru JEGA**, former Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) of Nigeria. The Mission is supported by a technical team from the ECOWAS Commission, led by the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, **Ambassador Abdel-Fatau Musah**. It was also supported by the Resident Representative of ECOWAS in Liberia, **H.E Ambassador Josephine NKrumah**.
6. The ECOWAS EOM is deployed with a mandate to observe the conduct of critical phases before, during and after the elections, with a view to ensuring that the processes are conducted in compliance with extant legal frameworks and international best practices and making critical recommendations for further improvement of the electoral process in Liberia. The EOM also serves as a rapid response mechanism for preventive diplomacy initiatives on challenges emanating from the electoral processes.
 7. The membership of the EOM is drawn from the ECOWAS Parliament, Community Court of Justice, the ECOWAS Permanent Representatives Committee, the ECOWAS Council of the Wise, Foreign Affairs Ministries and Election Management Bodies of Member States, as well as Civil Society Organizations and the media.

II. CONTEXT OF THE 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS

8. The 2023 General elections are the fourth consecutive nationwide elections in Liberia since the end of the civil war two decades ago, and the first since the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) completed its mandate and final withdrawal on 30 March 2018 and 28 June 2018, respectively. It is also the first



elections to be independently managed by the country, with a biometric voters' register as a means of enhancing the integrity of the elections. The country has also successfully navigated a peaceful transition of power from a ruling political party to an opposition party, thus strengthening the country's credentials as an emerging stable constitutional democracy in the West African region.

9. In preparation for the general elections, the National Elections Commission (NEC), for the first time, compiled a new voters' register, using biometric features of citizens. Even though the biometric verification process was not needed for voting, the purpose of the Biometric Voters' Registration (BVR) was to ensure a credible voters' register. At the end of the registration process, the NEC certified **2,471,617** as the final total registered voters. This number comprises **1,237,257** females (50.05%) and **1,234,360** males (49.94%). Also, among the total voters captured, **12,399** Persons Living with Disabilities (PLWDs) were registered.
10. Attempts to make it mandatory for political parties to reserve at least 30% of candidates for elective offices for women was vetoed by the President in March 2023, citing constitutional implications and time-sensitivity. Determined to actualize this, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the NEC and political parties, committing and obliging political parties to ensure this provision was adopted. While this signals a commendable commitment to increase women's participation and representation in politics and governance, the Mission notes that the quota was not met in these elections as women candidates constituted only 15% of the total candidates who filed their nominations with the NEC, despite women accounting for over fifty per cent (50.2%) of the Liberian population.
11. The election campaign period officially kicked-off on 4 August 2023 and ran through to 8 October 2023 in line with the NEC Guidelines for Campaigns. On



4 April 2023, major Presidential candidates signed the Revised Farmington River Declaration, committing themselves, and their political parties, to uphold peace before, during and after elections. The parties also agreed, by this Declaration, to use laid down legal means to seek redress for any electoral disputes. The ECOWAS Mission notes that although campaign events were largely peaceful, some skirmishes were reported between supporters of the two main political parties, Unity Party and the Coalition for Democratic Change. The Mission noted the incidents which led to loss of lives and injury in Lofa City, and also condemned the clashes in Monrovia on 8th October 2023 (the last day of elections campaigns) leading to violence and reported attacks on the convoy of the President and candidate of the Coalition for Democratic Change (CDC). Similarly, the Mission notes the use of social media platforms to spread hate speech, misinformation, and disinformation, despite efforts by ECOWAS and other stakeholders to discourage them.

12. The Mission notes infrastructure challenges to the conduct of the polls, particularly transportation of election materials by the NEC to the hard-to-reach areas, deployment of security forces for the management of election security and citizens commuting to their respective places of voting. This situation was further exacerbated by the constitutionally scheduled time for the conduct of the general elections, which coincides with the rainy season.
13. The Mission also notes the relative pluralism of the media landscape, with most of the private media owned by politicians. Nonetheless, the media including the ECOWAS Radio were used as platforms for voter and civic education, including electoral campaigns. Generally, the media exhibited independence, fairness, impartiality and accountability, in addition to taking up the national assignment in educating the citizenry about the electoral processes and often relaying information from the NEC to the electorate.



III. ENGAGEMENTS WITH STAKEHOLDERS

14. Upon arrival in Monrovia on 2 October 2023, the Head of Mission and his delegation held consultations with relevant stakeholders on the electoral process, including with the President of the Republic and candidate of the CDC, H.E. George Weah, the Unity Party (UP) candidate, former Vice President Joseph Boakai and other presidential candidates and political parties taking part in the election.
15. The Mission equally held consultations with the Chairperson and Commissioners of the National Elections Commission (NEC), the Inspector General of Police, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Justice and other critical stakeholders including Civil Society organizations.
16. The Mission also held consultations with other Heads of International Election Observation Missions, including the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU), EISA, the Carter Center, the West Africa Elders Forum (WAEF), WANEP, YIAGA-AFRICA as well as the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel.

IV. ELECTION DAY

17. On Election Day, the Mission deployed 120 observers, grouped into 54 teams, across the country. The observers visited a total of 576 Polling Stations spread across both urban (52%) and rural areas (48%) in 13 out of the 15 counties of the country, and reported the following:

Opening of the Polls

18. Generally, all the 60 polling stations visited by our teams of observers at the start of polls opened within 30 minutes of the official opening of 08:00.



Whereas 57 (representing 95%) of polling stations opened at 08:00 am, only three polling stations (representing 5%) opened after 08:00 am but before 09:00 am. No significant delays were observed at the start of polls.

19. The atmosphere at Polling Stations was generally peaceful with security agents present in 91.67% of the polling stations visited. The ECOWAS Mission also observed security patrols across voting precincts.

20. A significant number of party agents and representatives were seen at the polling stations. Fifty-nine out of the sixty polling stations, representing 98.3%, had agents of the candidates and parties present, apart from Vision for Liberia Transformation Party that didn't have an agent in any of the 60 polling stations at the opening of polls.

21. Domestic and international election observers from the African Union, European Union, Brenthurst, EISA, WANEP, Women Situation Room, and LEON, among others, were spotted in many of the polling centers visited.

Voting Process

22. A significant number of Polling stations (99.03%) were set up in a way that guaranteed the secrecy of the ballot. However, in few places such as at Frank Town Public School polling station in Bentol City, Montserrado, Zokeseh Community School polling station in Garr Bain, Nimba and Market Hall 2 polling station at Voinjama, Lofa, the voting screens and booths did not provide adequate cover for voters to secretly express their choice.

23. In general, voters were required to present their voters' card to cast their ballot. Nonetheless, in 18 Polling stations visited (representing 3.49%), observers witnessed that voters were allowed to vote even though their names were not



on the voters' register at those stations. Some of the people who were allowed this dispensation included polling staff and security personnel on duty, as well as drivers of international observers (who could produce voter identity cards). This dispensation was allowed in full compliance with the NEC manual on polling process where voting by polling staff, NEC officials on duty, Election security personnel, international observers drivers, and other special civil servants, are allowed, provided the voter is in possession of a valid 2023 BVR card, an accreditation badge issued by the NEC, or personal or work-related ID card.

24. The sheer number of party agents and the absence of copies of voters' register in their possession did not allow for adequate verification of voter identity by the agents.
25. Voting materials were generally available in sufficient quantities in polling stations that our observers visited. With respect to inclusion, 384 Polling stations visited, representing 74.42% were accessible to Persons living with Disability (PWDs). Observers also reported that there were tactile ballot jackets in 66.09% of the Polling stations visited. It was, however, observed that in as much as accessibility to polling stations was high (74%) for persons living with disability, not much preference was given to such group of people, including the elderly, pregnant women and others with mobility challenges, the opportunity to cast their votes, as they all struggled with everyone in the queues to vote.
26. Observers did not witness any active campaigning around the Polling precincts visited. Observers also noted long queues, slow pace of the voting process and congestion in most of the polling stations visited.
27. Overall, the voting process was sluggish, in part due to the sheer size of the presidential ballot papers, the cumbersome folding and slow pace of processing voters.



28. A notable incident, however, occurred at the Mambo Public School Polling precinct at Tewor, in Grand Cape Town, where the seals of the Ballot Boxes transported to the center had broken, unknown to the electoral officials. Party agents, voters and community opinion leaders insisted that voting could not start until the issue was resolved. Consequently the Elections Commission's officials in the district assured the voters of requesting for new sealed ballot boxes to allow for voting to start. As at 4:00 pm, voting had not started at the Mambo Public School polling precinct, generating chaotic scenes.

Closing and Counting

29. Generally voting ended between 6:00 pm and 11:00 pm. In 83% of the polling stations, voting ended between 6:00 pm and 8:00 pm. In 62% of the polling stations visited, voters waiting in queues to vote after the official closing of polls were allowed to cast their ballot in accordance with the law.
30. In all the polling stations visited, the opening of ballot boxes, sorting and counting of ballots were done at the stations and in clear view of party agents and election observers. However, there was poor lighting in 33% of the polling stations as counting of votes continued deep into the night.
31. Reconciliation and Results Forms (RRFs) were filled out at the Polling stations and party agents were allowed to endorse them.
32. Overall, the sheer number of registered voters per polling unit (500-520) in often cramped spaces contributed to the sluggishness of the voting process and tensions in the queues.



V. PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

33. The Mission notes the challenges associated with infrastructure and their impact on the smooth conduct of the elections. While the Mission urges the Government to put in measures to ameliorate the infrastructure conditions of the country, it also urges the National Parliament and other critical stakeholders to consider the review of the relevant portions of the Constitution and the electoral law to allow for national elections to be held on dates during the dry season.
34. The Mission notes that the polling process generally proceeded smoothly and in a largely peaceful atmosphere, and eligible voters were able to freely participate in the process, even though the long queues, congestions at the voting precincts and the slow pace of the process led to some grumbling and agitations by voters. To address congestion and long queues at polling precincts, reforms may be introduced in the electoral laws to reduce the number of voters per polling unit, taking into cognisance the resource need for such reforms.
35. The Mission commends the sense of patriotism exhibited by polling staff, the security forces and the general populace, who collectively played their parts in ensuring a peaceful conduct of the 2023 general elections.
36. The ECOWAS Election Observation Mission wishes to appeal to all stakeholders, particularly the political parties, candidates and their supporters, as well as the security forces and the general citizenry to remain calm and patiently wait for the official declaration of the results by the National Elections Commission, the sole organ mandated to do so under the law.
37. Similarly, the Mission wishes to remind candidates and political parties on the commitments made within the framework of the Revised Farmington River



Declaration to use only legal channels and lawful means in addressing any disputes that may emerge from the conduct of the 2023 general elections. We similarly appeal to all stakeholders to refrain from making any statements that may lead to a breach of the peace.

38. The Mission urges the National Elections Commission to diligently, but urgently, work to ensure the timely and transparent release of the results to defuse any latent tensions that may arise out of long waits for results.
39. The Mission will continue to closely monitor the concluding phases of the electoral process, in particular the aggregation, collation and release of the results from the counties and the declaration of preliminary results nationally and will make further pronouncements should the need arise.
40. Finally, the ECOWAS Election Observation Mission highly commends the vast majority of the electorate for the patience and sense of patriotism exhibited by them, and would wish to urge same display of high sense of maturity, whilst awaiting the official announcement of the results by the Liberia National Elections Commission.

Done in Monrovia, Liberia, on 12 October 2023

Attahiru Jega 12/10/23

**PROFESSOR ATTAHIRU JEGA
HEAD, ECOWAS ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION**