

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OF SIERRA LEONE



KAMBIA-SIERRA LEONE

TUESDAY, 27TH AUGUST 2019

STATEMENT ON THE VIOLENCE OF 24th AUGUST 2019 ON THE RE- RUNS ELECTION IN CONSTITUENCY 110 WESTERN AREA RURAL DISTRICT

The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) in fulfillment of its mandate to protect and promote human rights and in a bid to ensure a culture of respect for human rights in Sierra Leone plays a pivotal role in electoral processes. HRCSL monitors and documents human rights violations as provided for in Section 7(2) (f), and also makes recommendations pursuant to Section 24(1) (b) of HRCSL Act (No. 9) of 2004.

In line with the above functions, HRCSL on 24th August 2019 monitored the re-run Parliamentary Election in Constituency 110 in order to ascertain the level of compliance with human rights standards relating to elections by all stakeholders.

The Commission observed that voting in most polling stations visited started at 7a.m. There were representatives from contesting political parties in many polling stations visited. The presence of security personnel was glaring and national and international observers were present. Voting remained peaceful until late afternoon.

HRCSL fully witnessed and noted the outright display of electoral violence at Polling Center No. 15086 (Sarah Modern Preparatory School) around 4:20 p.m. This incident led to the destruction of ballot boxes containing marked ballot papers and other sensitive election materials in the presence of security personnel and other observers. The school structure and furniture were damaged in the process. The Commission further observed that there were several non-accredited political party operatives whose presence was unhelpful to the tensions.

HRCSL unreservedly condemns such electoral violence as it undermines not only the outcome of the overall election results but also the enjoyment of fundamental human rights as enshrined in Section 31 of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone and Article 25 (a) (b) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which guarantee citizens' rights *“to take part in the conduct of public affairs directly or through freely chosen representatives”* and *“to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections”*. HRCSL observed that, the display of violence on 24th August resulted in the denial of the right to vote of some right holders who fled the polling centers without exercising their franchise.

HRCSL views the incident of 24th August 2019 and the inaction of security personnel present at the scene as unfortunate. The Commission believes that the incident could have been prevented if the security personnel present had taken proactive measures.

The Commission notes the decision of the National Electoral Commission (NEC) in its Press Release dated 25th August 2019, to cancel the entire results due to the violence that erupted at the Sarah Modern Preparatory School.

The Commission is strongly concerned about the cancellation of the result which undermines the overall objective of the election and therefore calls on relevant stakeholders to prevent a recurrence.

In view of the foregoing, HRCSL makes the following recommendations:

1. That the Election Management Bodies (EMBs) institute an immediate independent investigation into the violence that occurred on the 24th August, 2019;
2. That the Sierra Leone Police at all times execute their work with professionalism;
3. That political party leaders denounce violence publicly, promote political tolerance and always endeavor to restrain their supporters from participating in violence;
4. That NEC and security personnel should allow only accredited persons around the polling stations/centers for future elections;
5. That NEC should strongly consider relocating polling center 15086 (Sarah Modern Preparatory School) to a more conducive and secure venue within the community for future elections.

The HRCSL assures the public and its partners that it remains committed to the protection and promotion of human rights in Sierra Leone.

SIGNED



Patricia Narsu NDANEMA
Chairman