

WEST AFRICA EARLY WARNING & EARLY RESPONSE NETWORK

# WARN

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## Sierra Leone Elections 2018

**TIPPING POINT FOR  
DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION  
OR RENEWED FRAGILITY?**



**WEST AFRICA NETWORK  
FOR PEACEBUILDING**  
BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS FOR PEACE

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### SIERRA LEONE ELECTIONS 2018

#### TIPPING POINT FOR DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION OR RENEWED FRAGILITY?

##### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Council elections will take place in Sierra Leone on March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018 amid increasing political tensions. There are growing critical concerns about the electoral process as to whether the outcome of the elections will consolidate or endanger the fragile peace in the country. Judging by recent reports from the local media and reports from the WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS), it appears that intra and inter-political party tensions remain high and are increasing as the Election Day draws near. These tensions have in many instances spiraled into sporadic physical violence and intimidations with regular clashes between rival political groups resulting in deaths and injuries.

An instance was the stabbing to death of a youth of the Sierra Leone Peoples' Party (SLPP)<sup>1</sup> by a rival supporter of another camp within the same party in Kenema, Eastern Sierra Leone, as the party leaders met to reach an agreement on the conduct of lower level party executive elections.

Similar clashes were reported between rival camps of the All Peoples Congress (APC) party during the Party's delegate's conference in October 2017 while internal



Map of Sierra Leone with the national colours, Green, White and Blue – Photo Credit: Google Images.

wrangling and violent protests among political parties, particularly, the APC and SLPP have marred the parties' Conventions and the processes of awarding party symbols to aspiring candidates for various level elections across the country. Furthermore, violent clashes broke out between the APC and SLPP in Freetown and in Constituencies 050 in Port Loko, 025 in Kono, and 001 in Kailahun during the 2016/2017 local and parliamentary bye-elections.

<sup>1</sup> Karimu Peter George aka Daddy George was allegedly killed by Junior Fonnio on the March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016. They belonged to rival factions of the opposition party.

### West Africa Early Warning & EARLY RESPONSE Network (WARN)

The West Africa Early Warning Network (WARN) is an integral part of the West Africa Preventive Peacebuilding Program co-ordinated by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP). Through its WARN Program, WANEP is setting the stage for a civil society-based early warning and response network in Africa with emphasis on human security.

WARN covers the entire Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region.

Since 2002, WANEP entered into an agreement with ECOWAS through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in the framework of capacity building in Conflict Prevention. One of the goals of

this agreement is to interface WARN with the ECOWAS Early Warning Systems to optimize early warning conflict prevention in West Africa. In view of this development, WANEP has been operating a liaison office located at the ECOWAS Secretariat in Abuja, Nigeria since April 2003.

In recognition of the role and achievements of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding in Africa, particularly in West Africa, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations at its substantive session of 2006 granted WANEP Special Consultative Status to the UN. WANEP is therefore mandated to designate official representatives to the United Nations in New York, Geneva and Vienna to further its advocacy and outreach strategies for peace and human security.

Other issues of concern included the alleged torching of the Alliance Democratic Party (APD) office in Freetown while its presidential aspirant, Mohamed Kamarainba Mansaray was arrested and charged with possession of a stun gun and other misdemeanors. The presidential candidate of the Citizens Democratic Party (CDP), Musa Tarawally was also arrested a few days after he declared his candidature to run for the presidency on alleged corruption charges while serving as the Minister of Lands, Country Planning and the Environment under the APC Government. These violent incidents and perceived attempts to frustrate opposition party leadership do not augur well for peaceful and credible elections in the country in March 2018.

This policy brief draws on WANEP's highly-developed National Early Warning System (NEWS) which regularly captures evidenced-based and analytical reports on election-related violence in communities across the country. In this regard, this policy brief gives an overview of the current political dynamics in the country and highlights factors likely to heighten election tensions, best and worst-case scenarios and a conclusion. It further presents recommendations to draw the attention of key political actors, policy and decision-makers, and the wider stakeholders to the rising spate of political violence facing the March 2018 elections and provides options for response in order to ensure a peaceful outcome of the elections.

## 2. BACKGROUND

Since gaining independence from Britain in 1961, Sierra Leone has been led by the two major political parties, the APC and SLPP. In between and sometimes as a precursor to either of the parties coming into political power, there have been military juntas that have regularly seized power through military coup d'états.<sup>2</sup> A key feature of the political parties has been their formulation along ethnic and regional lines.<sup>3</sup> The SLPP is largely considered to have its stronghold in the South-East, while the APC – an offshoot of the SLPP – draws its support from the North-West of the country. At every election, political parties appeal to ethnicity as the easiest way to gain support and votes in their political strongholds. This in effect has allowed for the



**Mr. Mohamed N'fa Ali Conteh**

*National Returning Officer, Chief Electoral Commissioner and Chairperson, NEC Photo Credit: www.nec-sierraleone.org*

political landscape to be dominated by these two main parties with elections outcome marred by political intolerance, intimidation, thuggery and violence.

Sierra Leone has a majoritarian electoral system. With regards to the Presidential elections, this is straight forward in that the President must win 55 % of the votes cast to be elected. If this is not achieved in the first round then a run-off election is held for the two candidates with the highest number of votes. In the case of parliamentary elections, the First-past-the post (or Simple Plurality) system is used. This presupposes that the candidate with the majority of valid votes cast in an election, even if that majority is by 1 vote will be declared as the winner by the National Electoral Commission (NEC). This 'winner-take-all' adversarial model of democracy in which the losers of an election must wait out-of-power in loyal opposition for a period of five years to replace the government raises the stakes very high for violent conflicts.

## 3. PREVAILING POLITICAL CLIMATE

The race to succeed President Earnest Koroma is causing tensions and polarisation both within and between political parties. The contest is traditionally between the ruling APC and the main opposition, SLPP. However, a third party, the National Grand Coalition (NGC) led by Dr.

<sup>2</sup>Aldridge Adolfo (2010), Sierra Leone: Splitting Under the Strain of Elections?

<sup>3</sup>Ibid

Kandeh Kolleh Yumkella (the former head of the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation -UNIDO) has joined the race, threatening the dominance of the two main political parties. If NGC succeeds, it could be the first time since independence that Sierra Leone will have a new president that does not belong to the two dominant parties.

The NGC is however made up of senior members who broke away from the SLPP. Yumkella was an SLPP stalwart but decided to leave in protest and formed the NGC after accusing the SLPP of unfair treatment and intimidation before the party's conventions to choose the national executives and the presidential flagbearer for the 2018 elections. Similarly, the former 'two- times' APC elected Vice President, Chief Alhaji Sam Sumana – unseated for anti-party activities - has also formed the Coalition for Change (C4C) party and will contest as a presidential candidate in the coming elections. In like manner, another off-shoot from the APC is the CDP with the former Minister of Lands, Country Planning and the Environment, Musa Tarawally as its presidential candidate.

In recent reports, the latter was arrested and detained for alleged corruption crimes while serving in the ruling APC government. These intra and inter-party struggles and carpet crossing of politicians and constitutional violations have left a fractured and deteriorating relationships within and among political parties, thereby increasing the stakes for politically motivated violence in the election period.

#### **4. FACTORS DRIVING POLITICAL VIOLENCE AHEAD OF THE MARCH 2018 ELECTIONS**

The forthcoming elections in March 2018 is perceived as the most crucial and competitive elections that present Sierra Leone with a decisive moment in its post-conflict history. There are growing concerns about the outcome of the electoral process, whether the elections will consolidate or endanger the fragile peace in the country. Among the risk factors for violence in the country are: physical violence and destruction of properties, non-conformity with the rule of law, perversive culture of

corruption and socio-economic conditions, ethnic and regional divide, elections security and the use of media/social media and digital technology.

##### **4.1 Physical Violence and Destruction of Properties**

Trends of reported violent incidents in the media and through the WANEP NEWS suggest escalating intra and inter-party violence occurrences resulting in deaths, injuries and destruction of property. The recent upsurge in violent attacks on party offices and/or candidates as well as the destruction of campaign posters, especially by alleged political parties' supporters is worrisome. Within six months to elections, the WANEP NEWS recorded a total number of 56 reported cases of destruction of campaign posters and 78 inter-party disputes and violence during the awarding of symbols across the country. Prior to that, there have been breaches to the peace due to clashes between rival youth gangs and political cadres on the one hand, and between the youth and the security forces on the other hand in Freetown, Kenema, Kono, Portloko, Makeni, Bo, Bonth, Moyamba and Kailahun Districts. It is important to note that these violent incidents have the potential to erupt into widespread public disorder and subsequently affect the electoral process.

##### **4.2 Contentious Constitutional Compliance on "Dual Citizenship"**

The decision to implement the dual citizenship law as stipulated in Section 76 of the 1991 Constitution is seen by political analysts and civil society activists as an attempt by the Government to frustrate political opposition. The timing for the invocation of such constitutional provision is controversial given the fact that many past and current parliamentarians of the APC and SLPP had dual citizenship but were allowed to contest and won parliamentary seats in the 1996, 2002, 2007 and 2012 elections. Despite the fact that some candidates have denounced their foreign citizenship to meet this constitutional provision, there are likely to be long drawn-out legal battles to disallow the parliamentary candidacy of the NGC leader, Dr. Yumkella on the grounds that he denounced his dual citizenship in November 2017, months after he registered to vote and be voted for in the elections.

### 4.3 Ethnicity and Regionalism and Gender Disparity

Ethnic and regional alignments in politics continue to pose as one of the key drivers of conflict and violence in elections in the country. Political elites always bring to fore the ethnic card to attract empathy and woo votes from the two largest ethnic groups<sup>4</sup> in the country. In effect, voting patterns in previous elections suggest that the country is divided along tribal and regional lines with the APC dominating the North-West, while the SLPP in the South-East. This polarization of parties on north/south and ethnic lines and coupled with the “winner-take-all” electoral system increases the risk of violent conflict and violent situation during election period.

Another significant underlying issue is the low participation of women in the electoral process in the country. This could be attributed to many structural challenges including male dominance, economic indifferences and other socio-cultural norms of the society. In addition, elections are most often characterized by violence in Sierra Leone and as such women shy away from the process.

According to the NEC nomination data, a combined figure of 482 women were nominated out of 2,743 nominees to fill 511 local council seats and a total of 100 women nominated out of 792 nominees to contest for 132 parliamentary seats.

Again, out of 16 registered political parties contesting the presidential election only 2 women were nominated to contest for the presidency under Unity Party (UP) and Revolutionary United Front Party (RUF) as well as 2 women nominated as running-mates from the Alliance Democratic Party (ADP) and the National Unity and Reconciliation Party (NURP). These figures are unacceptably low and pose serious challenges for inclusive governance. Women constitute 50.9% of the total population and form the bulk of registered voters.

Thus, women's lack of or partial participation in the democratic governance robs the process of its wholesomeness. It is therefore necessary to work with women at all levels to enhance their involvement and participation in governance beyond the 2018 elections.

<sup>4</sup> There are fourteen ethnic groups in Sierra Leone with the Mende and Temne ethnic groups making up approximately 30 % each of the population.

<sup>5</sup> See [www.transparency.org](http://www.transparency.org) (Accessed, 4th February 2018).

<sup>6</sup> See [www.anticorruption.gov.sl](http://www.anticorruption.gov.sl) (Accessed, 4th February 2018).

<sup>7</sup> See interview by AYV Television Program “Hot Seat”, 1st February, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> See UNDP HDI 2016 – [www.hdr.undp.org](http://www.hdr.undp.org) (Accessed 4th February 2018).

<sup>9</sup> See [www.sl.undp.org/content/sierraleone/en/home/countryinfo.html](http://www.sl.undp.org/content/sierraleone/en/home/countryinfo.html)

### 4.4 Corruption & Socio-Economic Conditions

Corruption remains a critical structural problem in Sierra Leone. The country has been ranked at 123rd out of 176 countries in the Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index for 2016<sup>5</sup>. In spite of the existence of an Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) in the country, corruption is endemic and manifests itself in various forms at all levels of society.

Following the release of the Auditor General's Report on the Management of the Ebola Funds, there have been widespread public condemnation and concerns about the Government's position in the fight against corruption in the country. Even though the ACC has convicted some individuals for corrupt offences contrary to the ACC Act (2008)<sup>6</sup>, the public considered the ACC to be underperforming and being used as political weapon to witch-hunt political opponents. Also, the public perception is that the ACC only pursues lesser criminals leaving top-notches untouched pointing at the alleged Ebola Fund corruption and other issues in the previous publications of the Auditor General's Report. Recently, the sacked Minister of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, Dr. Sylvia Blyden has taken to mainstream and social media to expose the level of corruption and poor governance in the country<sup>7</sup>. Many will agree that the issues of corruption and youth unemployment will be key in the campaign trail by contending political parties in this elections.

Furthermore, the general socio-economic situation in Sierra Leone is cause for concern. The country remains among the world's poorest nations, ranking 179th out of 188 countries in the Human Development Index (2016)<sup>8</sup>. Poverty is widespread with more than 60% of the population subsisting on less than US\$1.25 a day and unemployment and illiteracy levels remain high, particularly among youth, while maternal and infant mortality rates are among the highest in the world<sup>9</sup>. According to the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC, 2004), socio-economic inequalities, youth marginalisation, social exclusion and a penchant for violence were part of the structural causes of the civil war. With elections being perceived as a 'do or die affair', such vulnerabilities, especially among youth could be exploited by those in politics to stimulate violent conflicts in the elections.



*The Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon hands over a blue helmet and UNIPSI's flag to President Ernest Koroma to signify the end of the peacekeeping mission in Sierra Leone -  
Photo Credit: WANEP SL*

#### 4.5 Elections Security

The March 2018 elections in Sierra Leone will constitute the fourth consequent electoral process and political transition since the end of the civil war in 2002. It is also the first election to be conducted without UN direct oversight after the exit of United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSI) in March 2014.

One of the key legacies of the UN engagement in Sierra Leone was reforming the security sector with particularly focus on the Sierra Leone Police (SLP). However, in recent times, the Police has been a sultry point of discussion in the media, meetings and other gatherings. It is on record that the Police used disproportionate force on unarmed civilians during peaceful demonstrations resulting in the death of many people and destruction of properties as it happened in Kabala, Moyamba, Kenema, Bo, Bonthe and Freetown. While the Police use the excesses of crowd control and maintenance of law and order as the reason behind the shootings, the fact remains that the colossal damage including deaths and injuries has been monumental. Moreover, this is happening within a context of an already divided Sierra Leone experiencing fragile peace.

The rampant civilian-police clashes are worrisome as it increases fear and dwindles public confidence in the ability of the SLP to protect and defend the people and the

tendency for the situation to metamorphose into “jungle justice and self-help”, especially in the lead up to the elections. In terms of election security, there are perceptions that the Police might be used by the ruling government and politicians to intimidate or suppress the opposition parties. These concerns have been expressed by opposition political parties and civil society organisations in series of letters and engagements with the leadership of the Police.

#### 4.6 Social Media and Digital Technologies

In the lead up to the elections, social media has been a centre of attraction for information on the elections and political parties. Due to the potential of social media creating public disorder and disunity among citizens, there are reports that the Government plans to control social media to prevent its misuse during the elections. However, such proposal has been met by tough resistant by some civil society organisations and the public.

A renowned Civil Society Activist and Human Rights Lawyer, Emmanuel Saffa Abdulai has stated that it would be unfortunate for government to continue cracking down on social media, stating that free speech is integral to democracy and participation in governance. The President of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), Kelvin Lewis cautioned the Government against unnecessary shut down of the social media ahead of the 2018 elections. Recently, Francis Josiah, NGC Young Generation Leader was arrested for alleged defamatory and libelous postings on WhatsApp against Mohamed Bangura, the former Minister of Information and Communication. Moreover, the Deputy Minister of Information and Communication, Cornelius Deveaux said government would not hesitate to shut down social media, if users continue to create insecurity and pose threat to the peace of Sierra Leone.

Another worrying development is the emergence of two online radio Stations allegedly being operated by members of the two leading political parties, APC and SLPP. The broadcasts are now dominated by hate speeches intimidation and incitements which has the tendency to create chaos and confusion as the nation moves towards elections.

## 5. SCENARIOS

In view of the forgoing analysis, this policy brief envisages the following scenarios playing out before, during and after the March 7th 2018, elections.

### 5.1 Best Case Scenario (Unlikely)

Despite the heated political landscape, the elections are held on March 7th, 2018 with no cases of disenfranchisement, violence and electoral irregularities. Voters report at the polling centers, the Police are able to protect them and voting goes on peacefully. During the post-election period, voters conduct themselves in a peaceful manner devoid of hate speeches, slanders, provocative comments and remarks. The election outcome is accepted by all and the losers congratulate the winners.

### 5.2 Most Probably (Middle) Case Scenario (Very Likely)

Based on the usual north-west/south-east voting patterns combined with the advent of new and formable political parties "the third force", the Constitutional provision indicating that the President must win 55% of the votes cast to be elected will not be met at first ballot. Therefore, a run-off presidential election is imminent between the two candidates with the highest number of votes. At this stage, alliances would be negotiated and a president will be elected. The will of the majority is respected and there is a smooth transition of power.

### 5.3 Worst Case Scenario (Very Likely)

The election is held as planned on March 7th, 2018 amidst political violence and confrontations between supporters of the various political parties, especially the APC, SLPP, ADP and NGC. The elections is trailed with accusations and counter-accusations by political parties claiming irregularities and electoral fraud as well as blaming NEC, Office of National Security (ONS) the media and civil society for not ensuring a level playing field.

However, the vote counting continues amidst anxiety and tensions; the results are eventually announced and the losers challenge the validity of the outcome and threaten to go to court. Political parties file an injunction against the elections results in the Supreme Court, who thereby, order

a run-off or defer the election. Political party supporters break into riot while the security forces and Military Aid to Civilian Authority (MACA)<sup>10</sup> are called in to maintain law and order which might be counterproductive.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

With respect to the above scenarios, the policy brief proposes the following recommendations for early response to prevent or mitigate the risk of violent conflict before, during and post-elections:

### ECOWAS/AU/UN and Development Partners

- The threat of electoral violence is looming in Sierra Leone. ECOWAS, AU, UN and international partners should intensify their engagements with President Koroma and other political leaders until the elections in March 2018 to ensure that leaderships of political parties are committed to promoting peaceful and credible elections;
- ECOWAS and AU should ensure that the contact groups of influential persons are present on the ground to closely monitor the political situation in the country and be prepared to undertake preventive diplomacy should there be a political stalemate;
- The ECOWAS/AU election observation missions should provide technical assistance and augment funding for elections security as well as work closely with the Sierra Leone Police and the Integrated Election Security Planning Committee (IESPC).

### Political Parties

- Political parties should provide adequate training for party agents in electoral process, procedures and preventing electoral fraud and irregularities;
- Political parties must desist from using political vigilantes for personal security during and after the elections and must also be held accountable for the behaviours of their supporters. The political parties should denounce and support law enforcement agencies to trace and prosecute electoral law offenders, irrespective of their allegiance;

<sup>10</sup>MACA, formally known as MAC-P emanated as a result of the war to mitigate crisis situations that required more professional police/military approach to maintain law and order.

- Political parties must also respect and adhere to the election code of conduct they have all committed to and the Rule of Law respected to ensure peaceful elections in March 2018;

#### **The Security and Judiciary Sectors**

- For the maintenance of peace before, during and after the elections, capacity of the security forces should be enhanced with adequate logistics to ensure maintenance of law and order;
- A strong, disciplined and neutral police force as well as the Office of National Security (ONS) would go a long way in addressing and curtailing the excesses of those sections of the society who may want to take the law into their hands, even if they are from the ruling government;
- The country's judiciary and other avenues of seeking redress should be fortified and facilitated to work efficiently so that all grievances in the elections are addressed without fear or favour;
- Timely and vigorous judgements of elections related litigations would constitute a violence arresting valve. In this regard, the country's judiciary must be seen to be independent and capable of making decisions without political interference of taking orders "from above."

#### **Civil Society and the Media**

- The WANEP National/District Election Response Groups (NERG/DERG) and the National Election Watch (NEW) should ensure effective monitoring and

reporting of the electoral processes as well as intensify public education campaigns on non-violence and better monitoring of the elections;

- The Independent Media Commission (IMC) and the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) should be vigilant to ensure more effective and efficient monitoring of the media code of conduct and ethics for peaceful elections. The media should also provide all political parties with equal coverage opportunity and set the agenda for healthy discussions on political parties' manifestos.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

As previously mentioned, violence has been a recurring feature of the elections in the country and by all indications, the March 7th, 2018 multi-tier elections seem to be following the similar trend. This election is crucial as it will usher in the second post-conflict political transition of power from one government to another.

Therefore, ECOWAS together with the international community has the moral responsibility to ensure that the processes of electing leaders do not become a source for renewed co



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