



ECOWAS COMMISSION
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ECOWAS ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION TO THE
2023 MULTI-TIER ELECTIONS IN SIERRA LEONE

FINAL MISSION REPORT

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APC	All Peoples Congress
AU	African Union
AYV	African Young Voices
ECONEC	ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ECSL	Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone
EMB	Electoral Management Body
EOM	Election Observation Mission
EON	Election Observers Network
EU	European Union
FGM/C	Female Genital Mutilation/Circumcision
FPTP	First-Past-The-Post
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Act 2022
ICPNC	Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion
IMC	Independent Media Commission
LEEC	Local Electoral Education Committee
LTO	Long-Term Observer
NEW	National Elections Watch
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PCM	Polling Centre Manager
PLV	Provisional List of Voters
PO	Presiding Officer
PPRC	Political Parties Regulation Commission
PWD	Person living with disability
PVT	Parallel Vote Tabulation
RRF	Reconciliation and Results Forms
SLBC	Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation
SLP	Sierra Leone Police
SLPP	Sierra Leone People’s Party
STO	Short-Term Observer
TEE	Tamper-evident envelope
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VIO	Voter Identification Officer
WADEMOS	West Africa Democracy Solidarity Network
WANEP	West Africa Network for Peacebuilding

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In keeping with the provisions of Articles 12 – 14 of the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, the ECOWAS Commission deployed a 95-member Election Observation Mission (EOM) to the 2023 General elections in Sierra Leone.

The mandate of the ECOWAS EOM was to observe the conduct of all critical activities in the electoral process leading up to, during, and immediately after Election Day to ensure that they meet internationally accepted standards of fair and credible democratic elections. The Mission also had the responsibility of serving as a rapid response mechanism for conflict prevention by providing analysis and recommendations to ECOWAS leadership for quick intervention as the process unfolded.

The 2023 General elections in Sierra Leone were the fifth consecutive nationwide polls in the country's democratic journey since the end of a 10-year brutal civil war in 2002. The 2023 general elections were held in a very polarized political atmosphere, where it was difficult to attain consensus on key aspects of the electoral process due to heightened suspicion and mutual mistrust among political actors. Although Sierra Leonean politics had for long followed regional and ethnic patterns, the pervasive use of social media and the anonymity it affords users significantly contributed to a rise in the use of invectives and hate speech against opponents. Such online bullying was also seen to reduce the civic space for engagement on pertinent issues of concern to citizens as any persons who seemed to hold contrary views were targeted. Furthermore, the electoral system for the conduct of legislative and local council elections was changed from the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) simple majority system to the Proportional Representation system without prior consultation with political parties.

The ECOWAS EOM's assessment methodology consisted of a mix of documentary research, on the one hand, and key informant interviews with various stakeholders in the electoral process on the other. Using international treaties and conventions that have been ratified by the Republic of Sierra Leone, the Mission assessed the level of compliance of various aspects of the electoral process with the various obligations arising from those treaties in order to objectively determine the extent to which the process could be adjudged to be fair and credible. At the end of its assessment, the EOM then proffered recommendations for improvement of the electoral process.

On the basis of its pre- and post-election findings, and its observation of Election Day procedures, the Mission concluded that in many respects the 2023 electoral process, in both its normative and practical implementation, gave effect to the rights of citizens to participate in the choice of their leaders. However, the full participation of citizens was limited by a generalized climate of fear driven by mistrust among various critical stakeholders, including the political parties, security agencies, and the electoral management body.

Following the weaknesses it identified, the Mission made some key recommendations for corrective action going forward:

To ECSL

- As much as possible, prioritize engaging all stakeholders, particularly the political parties, in all decision-making that has a direct bearing on the conduct of the electoral process. It may also be helpful to keep proper minutes of stakeholder engagements and get their representatives to sign off on the minutes;
- Consider reviewing the results collation/tallying procedures to make way for greater stakeholder involvement in the process. Decentralising results tallying to Locality and/or District levels can contribute to making the process more transparent and engender greater confidence in results announced;
- In order to ensure that polling staff are easily identifiable, there may be need to emphasise the importance of wearing proper identification tags and/or aprons during the training of polling staff;
- In order to ensure secrecy of the ballot, ECSL should consider procuring polling booths rather than the current practice of voting behind partly transparent curtains.

To Political Parties

- In order to ensure proper and effective representation at the polling station level, political parties should consider organising trainings for their agents ahead of the conduct of polls. Such trainings should emphasise the need for effective presence and proper record-keeping of all happenings in their assigned polling station;
- Make deliberate efforts to comply with The Gender Equality and Women Empowerment Act (2022) and take steps to support women candidates to increase their level of participation and winning seats in parliament and local councils.

To the Government of Sierra Leone

- Given perennial concerns over the independence of Electoral Commissioners appointed by the President of the Republic, Parliament should consider reviewing the mode of appointment of members of ECSL as contained in Section 32(3) of the Constitution. It may consider a system where interested candidates would submit their expression of interest to an independently constituted panel whose duty it will be to screen applicants and establish a shortlist of the most competent profiles for the President's consideration. The membership of the panel may be drawn from such professional bodies as the Sierra Leone Bar Association, the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists, and other similar bodies;
- In order to demonstrate citizens' freedom of association and encourage greater popular participation in the electoral process, security agencies should refrain from using excessive force in handling issues related to the conduct of elections;

To ECOWAS and the International Community

- Continue engaging with all stakeholders to ensure that political solutions are found for lingering issues.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1: Rationale for the ECOWAS Mission

In keeping with the provisions of Articles 12 – 14 of the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001), which mandate the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to provide assistance to member States conducting elections, ECOWAS engaged with the 2023 electoral process in Sierra Leone right from its onset. As such, an ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC)-led post-election follow-up and Needs assessment mission was deployed to Sierra Leone in April 2022 to evaluate the level of implementation of the recommendations made by the ECOWAS Election Observation Mission (EOM) to the 2018 General elections in the country. This was followed in April 2023 by a joint ECOWAS-African Union pre-electoral fact-finding mission whose objective was to assess the state of preparedness of the major stakeholders in the electoral process. It is in continuation of its engagement with the Sierra Leonean electoral process that an ECOWAS Election Observation Mission (EOM) was deployed to observe the 2023 multi-tier elections in Sierra Leone.

1.2: Mandate and Methodology of the Mission

The ECOWAS EOM, led by His Excellency, Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, AU Special representative for the Silencing the Guns Initiative and former Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General for West Africa and the Sahel, was deployed with a mandate to observe the conduct of all critical activities in the electoral process leading up to, during, and immediately after Election Day to ensure that they were consistent with internationally accepted standards of fair and credible democratic elections. The Mission also had the responsibility to serve as a rapid response mechanism for conflict prevention by providing analysis and recommendations for quick intervention as the process unfolded. Finally, the long-term observers (LTOs) deployed to different Districts of the country were mandated to prepare the ground for the arrival of the short-term observers (STOs).

The ECOWAS EOM's assessment methodology consisted of a mix of documentary research, on the one hand, and key informant interviews with various stakeholders in the electoral process on the other. Using international treaties and conventions that have been ratified by the Republic of Sierra Leone, the Mission assessed the level of compliance of various aspects of the electoral process with the various obligations arising from those treaties in order to objectively determine the extent to which the process could be adjudged to be fair and credible. These international treaties and conventions include:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948);
- Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1953);
- ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001);
- Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003);
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (2004);

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007);
- African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (2008).

At the end of its assessment, the EOM proffered recommendations for improvement of the electoral process.

2. CONTEXT OF THE 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN SIERRA LEONE

Since the end of its civil war in 2002, Sierra Leone has set itself on a resolute democratization trajectory, regularly conducting general elections to elect its President, Parliamentarians, and local Councilors. The 2023 General elections in Sierra Leone were the fifth consecutive nationwide polls in the democratic journey that had so far witnessed two peaceful transitions of power, in 2007 and in 2018, between the two dominant political parties: the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) and the main opposition All Peoples Congress (APC).

The build up to the 2023 elections were however characterized by a very polarized political atmosphere, where consensus was rendered difficult by heightened suspicion and a complete absence of trust among political actors. This situation was made worse by the view among some stakeholders that the judiciary had lost its independence, largely serving as a tool to further the aims of the ruling party. This perception was crystallized in the fact that the presidential candidate of the APC, Dr. Samura Matthew Wilson Kamara, was being tried for alleged corruption during his time as Foreign Affairs Minister under the APC government of former President Ernest Bai Koroma.

However, the unhealthy atmosphere found its roots in the events that followed the conduct of the 2018 General elections where the SLPP won the Presidency while the APC obtained a majority of seats in Parliament. Under controversial circumstances that excluded some sixteen APC legislators from participating in the election of the Speaker of Parliament, due to High Court injunctions against them, the Speaker was elected from the ranks of the ruling SLPP despite not having a majority in Parliament. The situation was exacerbated in 2019 when the High Court finally revoked the seats of ten out of the sixteen APC legislators, who were being prosecuted for alleged breaches of the electoral law and replaced them with SLPP candidates.

Furthermore, the decision by Statistics Sierra Leone to conduct a mid-term census in 2021, amid the COVID-19 global pandemic that led to lockdowns and restrictions on movement across many parts of the world, further heightened the climate of suspicion in the polity. The resultant population figures released by Statistics Sierra Leone became the object of severe contestation among large sections of the population, including civil society and political parties, who queried how the figures were arrived at given the fact that Statistics Sierra Leone was not able to deploy enumerators in every part of the country. This dissatisfaction with the census figures had dual implications for the 2023 electoral process: on the one hand, the 2023 voters' register was extracted from the national civil register arising from the disputed census figures; and on the other hand, the

Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone's (ECSL) decisions on electoral boundary delimitation were in part influenced by the outcome of the 2021 mid-term census figures.

Additionally, although Sierra Leonean politics had for long followed regional and ethnic patterns, the pervasive use of social media and the anonymity it affords users contributed significantly to a rise in the indiscriminate use of invectives and hate speech against political opponents by supporters of the various political parties, particularly the two major ones. Such online bullying reduced the civic space for engagement on pertinent issues of concern to citizens as any persons who seemed to hold contrary views were targeted. This perverse use of social media ultimately led to an undue militarization of the 2023 electoral process as the army was often deployed to help address the consequences of social media-induced public disorder. A social media user based in The Netherlands, popularly known as "Adebayo", became notorious for his incendiary comments and calls to insurrection.

Similarly, the ECSL's decision to change the electoral system for the legislative and local council elections, without prior consultation with all stakeholders, from the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) simple majority system to the Proportional Representation system also greatly contributed to the climate of suspicion that tainted the 2023 electoral process. It should be recalled that the FPTP electoral system had been used for legislative and local council elections during the three preceding electoral cycles. Nonetheless, some political parties approached the Supreme Court to challenge the ECSL's decision, but the court ruled that the Proportional Representation system does not impinge on citizens' rights to participate in the choice of their representatives.

On 14 June 2023, citing a number of grievances against the ECSL leadership and the guidelines for the conduct of the 2023 general elections, the leader of the main opposition APC granted a press conference at which he issued a 72-hour ultimatum for the leadership of ECSL to resign and give way for an independent internationally-accredited team of electoral commissioners to conduct the elections. This ultimatum further inflamed the climate of distrust between the ECSL and the APC, prompting the Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion (ICPNC) and the Political Parties Regulation Commission (PPRC) to jointly convene a mediation dialogue between the APC, ECSL, and Sierra Leone Police (SLP) on 19 June 2023.

The 2023 general elections also took place in a climate of protracted economic downturn brought about by the twin adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war with the attendant spiraling inflation and a drastic drop in commodity prices. With sky-high unemployment hovering around 60%, especially among the youth, the unbearable economic hardship led to street protests in August 2022 which were brutally quelled by the army and security agencies. Underpinning the unhealthy climate of distrust and mutual suspicion in the polity, the government attributed the street protests to an opposition ploy to exploit the global economic downturn for political gains at home.

It was in this context that the 3,374,258 registered voters for the 2023 electoral process were convened to vote for the President, Parliamentarians, Mayors/District Council

Chairpersons, and Local Councilors on Saturday, 24 June 2023. The Presidential election was largely seen as a two-horse race between the incumbent President and candidate of the ruling SLPP, Brigadier (rtd) Julius Maada Bio, seeking reelection, and the candidate of the APC, Dr. Samura Matthew Wilson Kamara. It was unlike the 2018 process when the emergence of two other parties, the National Grand Coalition (NGC) and the Coalition for Change (C4C), posed a credible challenge to the historic dominance of the SLPP and the APC.

3. LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

3.1: Constitution and Electoral Laws

The legal framework for the conduct of the 2023 General elections in Sierra Leone consists of the following pieces of legislation:

- The Constitution of Sierra Leone (1991);
- The Political Parties Act (2002);
- The Public Elections Act (2022);
- Local Government Act (2022);
- Proportional Representation Regulation (2022);
- Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act (2022);
- The Persons with Disability Act (2011);
- Code of Conduct for the Media (2017);
- Code of Conduct for Political Parties (2017);
- Code of Conduct for Observers (2017);
- Code of Conduct for Security Forces (2017).

The 1991 Constitution established the Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone (ECSL) and vests it with the legal authority to prepare and conduct all public elections and referenda in Sierra Leone. The ECSL is also responsible for the registration of voters and the conduct of elections in every constituency.

While the ECSL is responsible for registration and the actual polling process, The Political Parties Act 2022 established The Political Parties Regulation Commission (PPRC) which replaced The Political Parties Registration Commission. The new body, PPRC, is now vested with the power to regulate both political parties and independent candidates contesting parliamentary and local government elections and ensure compliance with the code of conduct. The PPRC has the power to impose punitive measures for non-compliance and to ensure campaign finance is within the scope of the law.

Sierra Leone thus has two main distinct, but complementary, institutions managing and overseeing different aspects of the electoral process. The ECSL is primarily responsible for the polling process including the registration of voters while PPRC is responsible for regulating the electioneering activities as well as being the oversight body for political parties and their conduct so far as elections are concerned. This separation of powers allows the ECSL to focus exclusively on delivering free, fair, credible and transparent

elections while the PPRC complements the work of the ECSL by regulating the conduct of political parties.

Chapter III of the 1991 Constitution expressly recognizes and protects fundamental rights and freedoms of each individual irrespective of tribe, place of origin, political opinion, creed or sex, protection from arbitrary arrest or detention, freedom of assembly and association, freedom of expression and the press, freedom of movement, freedom of conscience, secure protection of the law and the right to fair hearing and protection from discrimination. The legal framework for the conduct of elections in Sierra Leone provides most of the guarantees for the conduct of credible elections and substantially complies with international standards and instruments that Sierra Leone has signed on to.

In terms of enhancing women's participation and representation in politics and the right to contest elections for public office, Sierra Leone's Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act 2022 (GEWE) introduced innovative mechanisms for gender mainstreaming with regard to the number of women candidates. In addition, the Public Elections Act (2022) provides that for every three candidates nominated by a political party, one of them must be female. GEWE requires a 30% quota for female representation. While both the numbers set by GEWE and the Public Elections Act are laudable and progressive in empowering women in the nomination process, both laws will face practical challenges because of inherent structural bias and discrimination against women, and pervasive cultural misogyny. Furthermore, these laws impose obligations on increasing the numbers for nomination only. There is no mechanism for ensuring a specific quota for women who are elected to Parliament.

3.2: Electoral System

According to the Constitution, the period for the conduct of elections shall be every five years across the full spectrum. The ECSL shall fix the actual date of elections, such date not being earlier than 30 days and not later than 60 days before the day appointed for voting in the elections. The ECSL conducts elections at various levels: Presidential, Mayoral, Parliamentary, and Local Councilors. According to Article 42 of the 1991 Constitution, "A Presidential candidate shall be nominated by a political party" and "The following provisions shall apply to an election to the office of President": (e) "no person shall be elected as President of Sierra Leone, unless at the Presidential election, he has polled not less than fifty-five percent of the valid votes in his favour;" and (f) "in default of a candidate being duly elected under paragraph (e), the two candidates with the highest number or numbers of votes shall go forward to a second election which shall be held within fourteen days of the announcement of the result of the previous election, and the candidate polling the higher number of votes cast in his favour shall be declared President."

Also, under the 1991 Constitution, a candidate can only be nominated by a political party to stand as President. This Constitution thus does not recognize independent candidates for the position of President.

3.3: Party and Campaign Finance

Political party finance is governed by The Political Parties Act 2022, specifically Part VII on Political Party Funds and Assets. The law limits the source of political party funding to the following means:

- (a) Contributions or donations, whether in cash or kind, from persons entitled to be registered to vote in a Presidential or Parliamentary election in Sierra Leone;
- (b) Contributions or donations from corporate bodies and other business houses;
- (c) Proceeds from the sale of party products;
- (d) Proceeds from investments;
- (e) Grants, gifts and donations; and
- (f) Annual government subvention for capacity building.

The Political Parties Regulation Commission (PPRC) had recommended that political parties receive subventions from government for their political activities. However, Parliament decided against a general subvention and instead only provides for annual subventions for capacity building. These subventions are used to pay for office space and other miscellaneous expenses and it is generally utilized by the smaller parties that lack the financial muscle of the bigger and financially stronger parties. Some analysts have suggested that Parliament might have decided against subventions for political activities because ruling parties could misuse the system to “buy” smaller parties or create a system whereby government could use subventions to sponsor smaller parties to gain their support. One possible consequence could be smaller parties accessing public funds in return for allying with the party in government. Payment of subventions for capacity building under the current system is not automatic. Political parties are required to satisfy certain conditions, such as the inclusion of females and persons with disability at all levels in order to receive subventions. Political parties are prohibited from using state resources, facilities or officials to conduct its day-to-day activities, campaigns and other electioneering exercises.

On transparency and accountability, political parties are required to make full and frank disclosure to the Political Parties Regulation Commission (PPRC) of the sources, amount, purpose and the use of funds raised by parties. Political parties are also required to make declarations of their assets, accounts and audit reports. They must also submit declarations to the PPRC of the source of their income, assets and liabilities together with audited accounts within 3 months after the end of the financial year. This is aimed at ensuring that political party finance regime is open, transparent, credible, and lawful.

On the declarations after elections, the law stipulates that a political party should submit a statement of its assets and liabilities within 21 days after the ESCL makes a notification of holding a public election, except bye-elections. A political party must also submit to the PPRC a single statement of all expenditure incurred either by the party or a candidate, specifying the manner in which the expenditure was incurred, statement within 60 days of the declaration of the results of a public election.

With respect to campaign financing, there is no law that specifically governs campaign finance for political parties. The Political Parties Act 2022, which established the Political Parties Regulation Commission (PPRC), does not prescribe or contain specific provisions on campaign finance. The Political Parties Act, under the Second Schedule, also creates a Code of Conduct that regulates the conduct and activities of political parties. The Code of Conduct under the Political Parties Act 2022 and the Code of Conduct under the Public Elections Act 2022 both seek to regulate the conducts of political parties, yet both Codes do not expressly provide the specific amounts and limits that parties must spend during political campaigns. However, insofar as the PPRC is concerned, by section 36(2) of the Political Parties Act 2022, there is some level of monitoring and supervision of political party finances. While this provision vests the regulator with the power to inquire into the finances of political parties and enhances transparency because of the legal obligation on political parties to make written declarations to the PPRC of their assets, accounts expenditure and audit reports, it does not give the regulator the statutory power to determine how much of a party's funds and assets declared should be used for campaign finance.

The Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC), the predecessor to the Political Parties Regulation Commission (PPRC), had recommended and advocated for the Political Parties Act to impose a ceiling on campaign finance. However, this was rejected by Parliament. In terms of financial means, the lack of a cap on campaign finance has the potential for imbalance and inequality and may inherently favour the incumbent. At the same time, some analysts point to the fact that the incumbent Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) government was defeated by the opposition All Peoples Congress (APC) in the Presidential elections in 2007. In the 2018 Presidential elections, the SLPP, then in opposition, defeated the APC, then the ruling party. This recent trend of the SLPP and APC interchanging political power in Sierra Leone may contradict the perception that without capping campaign finance, the incumbent government will always out-muscle the opposition to win. Nonetheless, it might be helpful to have a system whereby campaign finance is tightly regulated, including the imposition of mandatory caps for Presidential, Parliamentary, Mayoral/Chairmanship and Councilor elections.

3.3: Election Dispute Resolution

Under section 54 of The Public Elections Act (2022), any citizen of Sierra Leone who has lawfully voted in a presidential election may challenge the validity of that election at the Supreme Court within seven days after the declaration of the presidential election result.

In addition, Part XIII of The Public Election Act (2022) establishes an Election Offences and Petitions Court, pursuant to the 1991 Constitution. The Elections Offences and Petitions Court shall have jurisdiction to try: (a) election offences; and (b) election petitions. The Court shall determine cases brought before it within four months after the commencement of the proceedings. A defendant in a trial before the Court may be represented by a counsel of his own choice and bail shall be at the absolute discretion of the Court.

While Section 54 of the Public Elections Act states that contesting the outcome of presidential election results should be made to the Supreme Court, it is worthy of note that under Section 145 (Part XIII), which creates an elections petitions court, the said court shall have jurisdiction to hear matters relating to elections offences and elections petitions.

The Elections Offences and Petitions Division, established under The High Court (Divisional) Amendment Order, 2022 – Statutory Instrument NO.15 of 2022, the Public Elections Act states that when the court is looking into allegations of election non-compliance (election offences and petitions) with the Political Parties Act 2022, it shall not declare an election invalid if the court deems that the conduct of the polls was largely compliant with the law or that the non-compliance being complained of by the aggrieved party was not material enough to affect the election results.

On the basis of the foregoing, it was concluded that the legal framework, the various provisions of the constitution, pieces of legislation and statutory regulations create an adequate legal environment for the conduct of free and fair elections that represent the sovereign will of the people.

4. PRE-ELECTION FINDINGS

4.1: Delimitation of election boundaries

In line with the provisions of Section 38(4) of the Constitution, the ECSL is entrusted, pursuant to an Act of Parliament, with the responsibility of reviewing electoral boundaries at intervals of between five and seven years or following the conduct of a population census.

In 2021, Statistics Sierra Leone conducted a mid-term population census whose final results were released in September 2022. After a careful analysis of the data, ECSL found that the Population Quota for each constituency had considerably increased beyond the prescribed threshold of 50,000 inhabitants and thus there was a need to carry out a review of constituency boundaries. However, realizing that there wasn't enough time to carry out a fresh boundary delimitation exercise before the conduct of the 2023 General elections, the Commission decided to determine an average Population Quota using data from the 2017 and 2021 censuses. This average Population Quote was then used to allocate parliamentary seats to each District.

It is due to the inability to carry out a boundary delimitation exercise that the ECSL sought and obtained the approval of the President of the Republic to change the electoral system for the Parliamentary and Local Council elections from the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) simple majority system to the District Block Proportional Representation system.

In light of the foregoing, and considering the obligation for 30% female representation on candidate lists under the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act (2022), the

Mission noted that the District Block Proportional Representation system used for the 2023 General elections presented a unique opportunity for achieving the 30% female representation on party lists thus giving effect to equality between men and women in the electoral process.

4.2: Voter registration

The ECSL carried out a voter registration exercise from 3 September to 8 October 2022 for citizens eighteen years and above and eligible to vote. For this purpose, the Commission procured two thousand (2,000) laptop computers that were deployed across the country. The data of all eligible voters was obtained from the National Civil Registration Authority (NCRA) and uploaded onto the laptop computers.

The voter registration exercise thus involved two distinct processes: verification of biometric data for prospective voters whose data had already been captured in the national civil register; and biometric data capture for prospective voters who had not yet been included in the national civil register. After this process, ECSL carried out a de-duplication exercise on the voter registration data and found cases of double registration. Most of these were attributable to individuals whose data, despite being already captured in the national civil registry, could not be called up at the voter registration centres and thus proceed to do a fresh data captured. Following a clean-up of the register, ECSL then proceeded to display the Provisional List of Voters (PLV) from 24 – 28 October 2022 for voters to check their registration and details, and make claims and/or objections where necessary. At the end of the process, some 3,374,258 voters were registered across the country as follows:

Table 1: Distribution of Registered Voters by Region and District

REGION	DISTRICT	REGISTERED VOTERS
EAST	Kailahun	193,578
	Kenema	317,978
	Kono	174,205
NORTH	Bombali	206,250
	Falaba	69,128
	Koinadugu	85,258
	Tonkolili	207,342
NORTH-WEST	Kambia	152,549
	Karene	100,145
	Port Loko	236,923
SOUTH	Bo	317,585
	Bonthe	107,532
	Moyamba	150,210
	Pujehun	115,789
WESTERN	Western Urban	341,764
	Western Rural	598,022
NATIONWIDE		3,374,258

The distribution of voter cards was carried out from 7 – 16 April 2023. However, during the distribution exercise, there were complaints regarding the poor quality of voters' pictures on the voter ID cards produced by ECSL. In response to this, ECSL reprinted 19,000 voter ID cards whose distribution continued until Election Day.

On 8 June 2023, ECSL handed over the voters' register to representatives of the political parties. The APC however expressed reservations with the amount of information contained in the voters' register shared with political parties, arguing that it should contain as much detailed information about each voter as is prescribed in Section 13(1) of the Public Elections Act (2022). In response to this concern, the ECSL pointed out that the limited information was necessary for the purpose of data privacy protection.

4.3: Election Campaigns

Election campaigns kicked off nationwide on 23 May 2023 through midnight on 22 June 2023. Political parties' campaigns took several forms, including the use of billboards, door-to-door campaigns (distribution of party-branded gear), and rallies. However, following the PPRC's decision in March 2023 to ban street rallies that it claimed were major drivers of violence during campaign periods, political party rallies were confined to pre-determined venues. Thus, in line with the provisions of section 155 of The Public Elections Act (2022), various political parties held their campaign rallies based on a campaign calendar issued by the ECSL.

Although there were fewer physical clashes during the campaigns than in previous electoral cycles, the 2023 campaigns were fraught with indiscriminate verbal attacks on political opponents and sometimes the use of hate speech targeted at whole ethnic groups. There were also other more insidious attacks against rivals including attempts to deny certain political parties access to venues to hold their rallies. In Kono District, for example, there were reports that some Paramount Chiefs had tried to prevent some political parties, notably the APC, from holding campaign events in their domains. The PPRC had to organize dialogues between the Paramount Chiefs and political party representatives to impress upon them the need to allow all parties free access to conduct their campaign rallies. Similarly, in Tonkolili District, there were reports of the destruction of SLPP campaign materials and the burning of a supporter's motorcycle. In Bo District, it was the home of the APC Public Relations Officer and the APC Secretariat that were burnt down; and in Pujehun District, the APC secretariat was attacked, while the APC Polling Agents receiving training were attacked.

In view of the foregoing, the Mission noted that although the Sierra Leonean Constitution, in its third chapter, enshrines the fundamental human rights of citizens, the conduct of the election campaigns were marred by infractions that were in clear violation of Sierra Leone's obligation under Article 1(j) of the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001), which provides that the freedom of association and the right to meet and organize peaceful demonstrations shall be guaranteed. The

Mission thus highlighted the need for sustained civic education of citizens on the importance of political tolerance.

4.4: Civic and Voter Education

Unlike political party campaign posters and fliers that dominated public spaces, civic and voter education materials were not very widespread. With the help of funding from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), ECSL was able to conduct civic and voter education campaigns across the country through the airing of jingles on local radio stations and using loudspeakers mounted at vantage points. The jingles were prepared in various local languages to ensure that their accessibility to the widest possible audience. Local Electoral Education Committees (LEECs) were established to drive voter education and sensitization initiatives. To ensure maximum spread, the membership of the LEECs was drawn from market women, youth, persons living with disability (PWDs), and town criers.

There were also town hall meetings organized in partnership with civil society organisations (CSOs) to galvanise support for women candidates standing for elections and explain the functioning of the District Block proportional representation system. Additionally, specific trainings targeting women aspirants were also conducted to build their capacity around public speaking, and other election related matters. Similarly, peace conferences were also held for young people to sensitise them on the need for peaceful elections.

4.5: Preparedness of the EMB

Ahead of the conduct of the 2023 general elections, the ECSL put out an online advert for the recruitment of approximately 93,000 ad hoc staff to serve as *Polling Centre Managers* (12,087), *Polling Centre Queue Controllers* (11,832), *Presiding Officers* (11,832), *Polling Station Queue Controllers* (3,912), *Voter Identification Officers* (11,832), *Ballot Box Controllers* (23,664), and *Ballot Paper Issuers* (23,664).

At the end of the application period, which ended on 6 June 2023, training Polling Center Managers (PCMs), Presiding Officers (POs), and Voter Identification Officers (VIOs) commenced on 17 June 2023 and continued till 20 June 2023 across all the Districts of the country. Training for lower cadre staff, including Queue Controllers (QC), Ballot Box Controllers (BBC), and Ballot Paper Issuers (BPI) was conducted on 21 June 2023.

In line with the provisions of Sections 7, 42, and 171 of the Public Elections Act (2022) and the Public Elections (Early Voting) Regulations (2023), ECSL conducted an early voting exercise on Thursday, 15 June 2023 for the Presidential election for Hajj Pilgrims travelling to Mecca for the annual pilgrimage. A total of 231 out of 321 registered voters participated in the exercise.

On 17 June 2023, ECSL received the ballot papers on a cargo flight from South Africa in the presence of agents of political parties and commenced dispatching to the Regional

Warehouses. From the Regional warehouses, the distribution of electoral materials to the Districts commenced on 21 June 2023.

5. ELECTION DAY

On Election Day, the Mission deployed 95 observers (grouped into 39 observer teams) across 15 Districts. Only 1 District, Bonthe, was not covered due to difficulty in accessing the maritime area. These observer teams visited a total of 337 Polling stations.

5.1: Opening of the polls

The opening of the polls was characterized by delays in the arrival of polling officials and materials, and when they did arrive there were some instances of missing materials such as Indelible Ink, Gender Tally Sheets, Reconciliation and Results Forms (RRFs), Tamper-evident envelopes (TEEs), and Inkpads. Due to these delays, only about 37% of Polling Stations were able to start within the first hour i.e. between 7a.m. and 8a.m. The atmosphere at polling stations was generally peaceful as security personnel were usually present in the vicinity of polling centres and were professional in the discharge of their duty. Similarly, the two main political parties, the SLPP and the APC, had their agents in the vast majority of polling stations with SLPP agents seen in 98% of the polling stations visited while APC was represented in 94%.

5.2: The polling process

Notwithstanding the delays experienced at the opening, when polling eventually got underway polling stations were generally well set up to ensure that voters are able to express their choice in secret. Voters were required to produce their voter identification cards in order to be allowed to vote. However, the EMB's directive to allow voters, who only had a registration slip or who were able to prove their identity by answering some questions, was also observed in 8% of the polling stations visited.

With respect to inclusion of Persons living with disability (PWDs), a significant proportion (68%) of polling stations were easily accessible to wheelchair-bound voters. Tactile Ballot Jackets for the visually-impaired were also made available in 33% of polling stations visited.

Polling staff generally seemed to have a good grasp of the polling process although there was a case at a Polling Station in Tonkolili District, U.M.C Primary School, Ropolor Road, where the **Ballot Paper Issuer 1** was only issuing ballot papers for the Legislative election and not the Presidential election. When the APC District Youth leader noticed what was happening, this led to a chaotic situation that required the intervention of security agents to shut down the polling station. It is also worth noting that polling staff did not wear high-visibility vests or aprons to clearly identify themselves as such.

There were domestic and international election observers deployed by the following organisations:

Domestic/national observer groups	International observer groups
National Elections Watch (NEW)	African Union (AU)
Pentecostal Fellowship of Sierra Leone	European Union (EU)
Election Observers Network (EON)	West Africa Democracy Solidarity Network (WADEMOS).
Council of Churches of Sierra Leone	Embassy of the United States of America
	British High Commission
	The Carter Center

5.3: Closing of the polls and vote-counting

In light of the delays experienced at the start of the polls, 48% of polling stations expectedly did not close at the set closing time of 5p.m. In the polling stations where voters were waiting to vote, they were generally allowed to do so. For the 52% of polling stations that closed on time, it was mainly because there were no voters waiting in line to vote at closing time.

After the close of the polls, sorting and counting of ballot papers was done at the Polling stations and in the presence of party agents and observers. In 84% of Polling stations visited, the lighting conditions when vote-counting commenced were adequate but as the process proceeded they dropped significantly. In all of the Polling stations visited, the Reconciliation and Results Forms were filled out at the Polling station and party agents allowed to endorse them.

6. POST-ELECTION FINDINGS

6.1: Results Tallying

According to the ECSL’s training manual, the collation of elections results was supposed to proceed as follows:



The Regional Tally Centres were set up to function as follows:

- Blind data entry of RRFs;
- Identification and resolution of conflicts at the first step of data entry, where necessary;
- Review desk to determine which of the previous steps had made a wrong entry;

Although the Regional Tally Centres were open to party agents and observers, the process did not allow for external verification of the data that was being entered into ECSL's results database. The APC agents and some observers expressed concerns about the process, noting that it was not transparent.

6.2: Results of the elections

On 27 June 2023, three days after the conduct of the 2023 general elections, ECSL announced the results of the Presidential election as follows:

	Number	Percentage
Polling station results entered	11,712	98.98
Voter turnout	2,800,691	83
Valid votes cast	2,789,808	
Invalid votes	10,883	0.39

Table 2: Results of the 2023 Presidential Election

S/N°.	Name of Candidate	Political Party	Votes obtained	Percentage
1.	BAH, Mohamed Chernoh	National Democratic Alliance (NDA)	21,620	0.77
2.	BIO, Julius Maada	Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP)	1,566,932	56.17
3.	COKER, Prince	Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)	5,981	0.21
4.	JONJO, Mohamed	Citizens Democratic Party (CDP)	2,367	0.08
5.	KABUTA, Saa Turay	United National Peoples Party (UNPP)	4,059	0.15
6.	KAKAY, Iye	Alliance Democratic Party (ADP)	4,336	0.16
7.	KAMARA, Nabieu Henry	Peace and Liberation Party (PLP)	7,717	0.28
8.	KAMARA, Samura Wilson Matthew	All Peoples Congress (APC)	1,148,262	41.16
9.	MARGAI, Charles Francis	Peoples Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC)	16,012	0.57
10.	SACCOH, Abdulai Dougakoro	Revolutionary United Front Party (RUFPP)	6,796	0.24
11.	SANDY, Jonathan Patrick	National Unity and Reconciliation Party (NURP)	1,369	0.05
12.	SOWA-TURAY, Mohamed	United Democratic Movement (UDM)	1,665	0.06
13.	WILLIAMS, Beresford Victor	Republic National Independent Party (ReNIP)	2,692	0.10
TOTAL VALID VOTES CAST			2,789,808	100

On the basis of the above results, the candidate of the SLPP and incumbent President, Julius Maada Bio, was declared winner of the Presidential election.

Similarly, on 1 July 2023, the ECSL announced the results of the parliamentary elections as presented below:

Table 3: Results of the 2003 Parliamentary elections (Disaggregated by Gender)

DISTRICT	Share of Parties in Parliament		Women elected MPs				Total N°. of MPs
	APC	SLPP	APC	SLPP	Total	%age of women	
Bo	0	12	0	4	4	33%	12
Bombali	8	0	2	0	2	25%	8
Bonthe	0	5	0	2	2	40%	5
Falaba	2	2	1	0	1	25%	4
Kailahun	0	10	0	4	4	40%	10
Kambia	4	2	1	1	2	33%	6
Karene	1	4	1	0	1	20%	5
Kenema	0	12	0	4	4	33%	12
Koinadugu	3	1	0	0	0	0	4
Kono	3	7	1	2	3	30%	10
Moyamba	1	5	0	2	2	33%	6
Port Loko	4	6	2	1	3	30%	10
Pujehun	0	7	0	2	2	29%	7
Tonkolili	1	9	3	0	3	30%	10
Western Rural	5	5	1	2	3	30%	10
Western Urban	9	7	3	2	5	31%	16
TOTAL	54	81	15	26	41	30%	135
%age in Parliament	40%	60%	38%	62%	30.4%	30.4%	100%

6.3: Post-election environment

Following the conduct of the elections on 24 June 2023, the post-election environment was largely calm as political parties and their supporters followed the collation of the election results. In some areas, however, there was an uneasy calm as supporters of the APC expressed anxiety over fears of possible attacks in Kono District. In Tonkolili District, there were reports of attacks on Polling Centre Managers (PCMs) mainly perpetrated by APC supporters, who accused the polling officials of trying to stuff ballot boxes. This was the case with a PCM who had kept excess electoral materials (4 empty ballot boxes, 1 booklet of unmarked presidential ballots, 3 booklets of unmarked parliamentary ballots) in his office at the Baptist Primary School in Magburaka while awaiting collection by the ECSL Ward Coordinator. Similarly, there was also an attack on another PCM and the burning of a vehicle carrying electoral materials in the same District. The PCM was said to have been waiting to load some ballot boxes onto a vehicle when he was attacked on allegation of ballot box stuffing.

A day after the election, the APC reported the besieging of its headquarters in Freetown by security forces and the alleged killing of a woman at the premises. The Mission sent observers to the scene, who confirmed that police and military personnel had cordoned

off the APC headquarters. Senior security officers said the personnel were deployed there to prevent possible breach of law and order by APC supporters. On the intervention of the Mission, the senior officers ordered the police and military personnel to withdraw from the APC headquarters. The officers also told the Mission those police had launched investigation into the reported death of the woman at the APC headquarters.

After the announcement of the Presidential election results on 27 June 2023, there were sporadic scenes of jubilation in some parts of the country. On 30 June 2023, the APC issued a press release in which it rejected the Presidential election results announced by ECSL. It however did not state whether it intended to challenge the results in court. The party also demanded a rerun of the elections citing alleged irregularities. It further accused the ECSL commissioners, including the Chief Electoral Commissioner, as well as some security and cabinet ministers of bias and called for their resignation. The APC also urged development partners to impose travel bans on those it accused of working against democracy in Sierra Leone, including President Julius Maada Bio and his wife and some cabinet ministers.

7. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

7.1: Gender and Inclusivity

In 2003, Sierra Leone ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, which guarantees comprehensive rights to women, including taking part in the political process and addressing issues such as Female Genital Mutilation/Circumcision (FGM/C), violence against women, child marriage and women's economic empowerment. Sierra Leone has also ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1988.

Giving effect to these international treaties, the Constitution of Sierra Leone provides for equal rights for men and women in Article 27. In addition to the rights guaranteed under the Constitution, in 2007 Sierra Leone passed a series of "gender laws" to strengthen women's rights and protections. These laws include: the Domestic Violence Act, the Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act, and the Devolution of Estates Act. A Child Rights Act was also enacted in 2007. In 2012, these laws were followed by the enactment of the Sexual Offences Act.

However, despite the availability of these laws and ancillary policies and regulations aimed at the promotion of women's rights and protection, Sierra Leone continues to struggle with barriers to achieving gender equality due to socio-cultural norms and practices that discriminate against women and girls. These barriers contribute to high incidents of violence against women and girls which further prevents them from achieving their full potential in decision-making at all levels. According to UN Women, 29.6% of women aged 20 – 24 years old were married or in a union before age 18. Similarly, 19.8% of women aged 15 – 49 years reported that they had been subject to physical and/or

sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months. Furthermore, women of reproductive age (15 – 49 years) often face barriers with respect to their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

This state of affairs largely contributes to the situation where only 12% of parliamentary seats and 12.5% of cabinet positions in Sierra Leone are occupied by women despite accounting for over 51% of the country’s population (according to the 2021 Mid-term Census) and 51% of the 3,374,258 registered voters. Similarly, only 17% of the 446 outgoing Local Council seats were occupied by women. Women are also under-represented in leadership positions within political parties. For instance, only one of the 13 political party fielded a female presidential candidate. None of the two major political parties, SLPP and APC, have fielded female candidates as presidential and vice-presidential candidates for the June 2023 presidential election.

A landmark Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment (GEWE) Act was passed in 2022 with the aim of overcoming some of the barriers to women’s empowerment. The GEWE Law enshrines improvements to women’s access to finance, employment opportunities, equal pay, maternity leave, and most critically, political representation. The GEWE thus established a 30 percent quota for women’s participation in government for both appointed positions, including cabinet, ministry, and ambassador roles, and elected positions, such as parliamentary and local council seats. The GEWE quota went into effect ahead of the 2023 presidential, parliamentary, mayoral, and local council elections. In conjunction with Section 59 (2) of the Public Elections Act (2022), political parties were mandated to nominate one woman for every three candidate nominations presented for legislative and local councilor elections.

A gender analysis of nominated candidates revealed that only 8% of presidential candidates were women, 33% for parliamentary and mayoral, 21% for District Council Chairperson, 38% for the local council seats.

Type of Election	N°. of Male Candidates	% of Male Candidates	N°. of Female Candidates	% of Female Candidates	TOTAL
Presidential	12	92	1	8	13
Parliamentary	632	67	313	33	945
Mayoral	26	67	13	33	39
Chairmanship	60	79	16	21	76
Councillorship	1721	62	1039	38	2760

(Source: *Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone*)

7.2: Civil Society engagement in the process

Sierra Leone boasts of a very vibrant civil society space, with organisations intervening in most facets of public life. It is in this context that civil society organisations are actively engaged with the electoral process to promote peaceful conduct and also ensure its integrity.

Consequently, the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) implemented an Early Warning and Response System. The organization, with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) deployed 80 Peace and Conflict Monitors to various parts of the country from January to June 2023. It also set up Election Response Groups at national and local levels to help address potential challenges to election peace through mediation. Towards Election Day, the organization also deployed 350 Election Day monitors across the country and operated a Situation Room.

Similarly, the National Elections Watch (NEW), which is a coalition of over 400 civil society groups, has been observing the electoral process with the deployment of 34 Long Term Observers (LTOs) to all districts across the country (from May to July 2023) to monitor all the electoral processes and the activities of key stakeholders at the local levels. On Election Day, the Coalition deployed some 6,000 local observers to polling stations across the country, to observe Election Day procedures, voting, counting, and results collation. The organization implemented a Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) to verify the outcomes of the elections.

Some of the main concerns raised by civil society actors include the limited and late relay of information from the ECSL to electoral stakeholders, delays on the part of the ECSL with some planned preparatory activities, mistrust among stakeholders, and some level of political intolerance and possible incitement of voters. For example, concerns were raised about the late communication from the ECSL to stakeholders about the early voting exercise. Opposition parties and some international observers also raised questions over the transparency of the vote tallying and collation system.

7.3: The Media

The media are indispensable partners in democratic elections, including through their agenda-setting role that influence public policies, education of the electorate and political parties, and providing platforms for public information including political messages by candidates.

Section 25(1) of Sierra Leone's constitution enshrines freedom of expression and the freedom of the press. The constitution also places the obligation on the media to hold government and public office-holders to account (Section 11). Media freedom is guaranteed as the country has repealed a colonial-era criminal libel law. There however remains a 1961 Civil Defamation Ordinance, which is hardly ever used.

The practice of journalism in Sierra Leone is regulated by the Independent Media Commission Act (2020). This Act gives the Independent Media Commission (IMC) the power to issue regulations to give effect to its provisions. Members of the IMC are independently nominated by interest groups such as the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), the Sierra Leone Bar Association (SLBA), the Inter-religious council, the Institute of Engineers, civil society, etc. and then appointed by Presidential decree. The IMC is charged with the responsibility of registering, regulating, and sanctioning media professionals and organisations.

According to the IMC, there are over 530 registered media organisations in Sierra Leone, 300 of which are print media (newspapers and magazines). However, a significant number of these are dormant with only about 20 to 35 of the newspapers in regular circulation. Also, most of the newspapers are based in the nation's capital, Freetown. In the area of broadcast media, Sierra Leone has about one hundred and fifty registered radio stations, mostly community based. The country also has about four (4) functional television stations, including the state-owned SLBC, privately-owned Star Television Station and Africa Young Voices (AYV), whose signals cover most of the country. In most part of the country, outside of Freetown, radio is the dominant source of information.

Media ownership in Sierra Leone is broadly categorized into public service and private. Although some politicians own media organisations, the IMC insists on strict adherence to its editorial independence guidelines. Unlike in the past, media organisations are no longer allowed to endorse candidates and are obliged to grant all candidates equal coverage. To ensure strict adherence to this, the IMC set up a media monitoring unit, with monitors at Regional and District levels.

Based on its observation, the Mission noted that campaigns on broadcast media platforms were generally respectful. However, the use of social media and the anonymity of its users, especially bloggers raised concerns. Social media was used to propagate hate speech and cyberbullying against political opponents. Although Sierra Leone has a cybercrime law to regulate social media usage, its application remains very limited.

7.4: Use of Technology

To help speed up the results tallying process, the ECSL developed a Mobile Results Application for the 2023 General elections. According to ECSL's training manual for polling staff, Polling Centre Managers (PCMs) and Presiding Officers (POs) were assigned the responsibility of inputting polling station results in the application and uploading the information onto a server. However, citing a lack of involvement in the development of the application, the main opposition party, APC, vehemently opposed the use of the application for results transmission. On its part, ECSL explained that the Mobile Results Application was not meant to replace the manual results tallying processes, but rather serve as an additional layer for the verification of collated results.

The Mission noted that on Election Day, observers did not report widespread use of the application. This was probably due to the late completion of vote sorting and counting operations at polling stations. It should be noted that the electoral legal framework did not specifically provide for the use of technology in the conduct of any part of the electoral process.

8. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the foregoing, and in line with the obligations arising from the regional and international legal instruments to which the Republic of Sierra Leone is a party, the Mission arrived at the conclusion that in many respects the 2023 electoral process, in both its normative and practical implementation, gave effect to the rights of citizens to participate in the choice of their leaders. However, the attacks recorded in some places blighted the full realization of citizens' rights to security of the person and freedom of association.

In line with the weaknesses presented in this report, the mission put forward the following recommendations:

To ECSL

- As much as possible, prioritize engaging all stakeholders, particularly the political parties, in all decision-making that has a direct bearing on the conduct of the electoral process. It may also be helpful to keep proper minutes of stakeholder engagements and get their representatives to sign off on the minutes;
- Consider reviewing the results collation/tallying procedures to make way for greater stakeholder involvement in the process. Decentralising results tallying to Locality and/or District levels can contribute to making the process more transparent and engender greater confidence in results announced;
- In order to ensure that polling staff are easily identifiable, there may be need to emphasise the importance of wearing proper identification tags and/or aprons during the training of polling staff;
- In order to ensure secrecy of the ballot, ECSL should consider procuring polling booths rather than the current practice of voting behind partly transparent curtains.

To Political Parties

- In order to ensure proper and effective representation at the polling station level, political parties should consider organising trainings for their agents ahead of the conduct of polls. Such trainings should emphasise the need for effective presence and proper record-keeping of all happenings in their assigned polling station;
- Make deliberate efforts to comply with The Gender Equality and Women Empowerment Act (2022) and take steps to support women candidates to increase their level of participation and winning seats in parliament and local councils.

To the Government of Sierra Leone

- Given perennial concerns over the independence of Electoral Commissioners appointed by the President of the Republic, Parliament should consider reviewing the mode of appointment of members of ECSL as contained in Section 32(3) of the Constitution. It may consider a system where interested candidates would submit their expression of interest to an independently constituted panel whose

duty it will be to screen applicants and establish a shortlist of the most competent profiles for the President's consideration. The membership of the panel may be drawn from such professional bodies as the Sierra Leone Bar Association, the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists, and other similar bodies;

- In order to demonstrate citizens' freedom of association and encourage greater popular participation in the electoral process, security agencies should refrain from using excessive force in handling issues related to the conduct of elections;

To ECOWAS and the International Community

- Continue engaging with all stakeholders to ensure that political solutions are found for lingering issues.

ANNEXES