

**PRELIMINARY STATEMENT OF THE NDI / CARTER CENTER
INTERNATIONAL OBSERVER DELEGATION TO THE 2005 LIBERIA ELECTIONS**

Monrovia, October 13, 2005

This statement is offered by the 40-member multinational delegation jointly organized by NDI and The Carter Center. The delegation was co-led by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and former President of Benin Nicéphore Soglo. The delegation included elected officials, electoral and human rights experts, regional specialists and political and civic leaders from 14 countries in Africa, Europe and North America.

The delegation has conducted its activities in accordance with Liberian law and the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation. NDI and The Carter Center recognize that ultimately it is the people of Liberia who will determine the credibility of the election process; we do not seek to interfere in the process.

The delegation wishes to stress that the tabulation of results is still underway and that any election complaints and challenges that may be lodged will take some time to address in accordance with the rule of law. This statement therefore is preliminary in nature. Further statements may be released in the post-October 11 period, and a final report will follow shortly after the election process is completed. Subsequent reports concerning the Liberian election process, as well as those issued previously, will be found on the two organizations' respective web sites. (See below.)

I. SUMMARY

Liberians went to the polls in massive numbers and demonstrated their strong desire for peace and democratic governance. The election process thus far underscores that the country is poised to turn an historic corner towards sustainable peace and democratic progress. Should this be accomplished, there would be important benefits for stability and development here and in the sub-region.

Liberia's 2005 elections offer the opportunity to break with a history of armed conflict, authoritarian rule and the politics of exclusion. Following a remarkably peaceful and highly competitive electoral campaign, voting across the c

It is critically important that all of the stakeholders – government and electoral officials, candidates and political, religious and civic leaders – act responsibly in the days immediately ahead to ensure that the process remains on track. There are serious challenges to face in meeting this goal, and the international community should do everything possible to provide its continued assistance.

As the process unfolds, those who appear to be the winners of these elections should be magnanimous, while those who do not win the right to advance to the potential presidential runoff or to seats in the legislature should be gracious in accepting credible results. At the same time, all sectors of Liberian society should join in embracing the difficult national challenge of establishing inclusive, democratic governance. This is all the more important because some of the factors that contributed to conflict and frailty of the Liberian state still exist and will continue to challenge society as it moves beyond the elections.

Recommendations are offered at the end of this statement.

II. OBSERVATIONS

In order to accurately characterize an election proanmnl487 tu

without significant controversy, even though there is a large disparity in the ratio of constituents to representative among various counties.

Voter Registration. Liberians registered to vote in extraordinary numbers, particularly in light of the difficult logistical circumstances in the country. Approximately, 1.35 million people registered to vote out of an estimated 1.5 million eligible persons (approximately 90 percent). Half of the registrants were women, and approximately 40 percent of the registrants were between 18 and 28 years old. This demonstrates a determination among the population – particularly among women and young people – to turn away from using violence to determine who will hold governmental power.

Among the internally displaced persons (IDPs) located in camps, 71 percent chose at the time of voter registration to indicate that they would return to vote in their home counties. As time drew near to the election date, it became clear that large numbers of these people would not be able to return home. The NEC ruled that

A significant number of concerns were raised by political contestants, organizations conducting voter education and others noting that it was not possible to conduct voter education in numerous inaccessible localities. Poverty and a high incidence of illiteracy compounded the challenge. An estimated 75 to 85 percent of the electorate cannot read. Radio is the mass media with the largest reach, but many Liberians cannot afford radios. Programs with personal contact therefore played an important voter education role and large-scale programs were conducted. However, in the run-up to the elections, many raised concerns about the adequacy of voter education, including the last minute need to prepare for voters to mark up to two choices among the Senate candidates in the counties' ballots.

D. The Campaign

As noted in the Carter Center/NDI September 9 pre-election delegation statement, most of Liberia's political parties have developed around the personalities of key leaders, rather than on the basis of policies, issues and party platforms. Party organization is centralized within Monrovia and very few parties have sufficient resources or organizational structures to campaign at the grassroots level. Inaccessibility issues further hamper party branches' ability to communicate with party leaders. Nonetheless, an active campaign was waged by the parties and candidates. Freedoms of expression and movement were respected, as candidates could campaign where they wanted, subject to the logistical difficulties in moving about the country.

Parties and candidates reported that the political playing field was generally level, and they were free of state interference in campaigning. The campaign period, while not free of incidents, was peaceful. The Ministry of Justice, NEC and political parties restarted a long-standing dialogue to coordinate rallies and other campaign events to minimize confrontations. The NEC criticized early infractions and threatened to revoke accreditation of contestants involved in election violence, intimidation or harassment of voters or other candidates, which had a likely deterrent effect.

The Inter Party Consultative Committee allowed the contestants to receive information from the NEC and raise concerns. The Political Parties' Code of Conduct, which is Liberia's first such code and which was signed by all of the parties, stands as a positive symbol of the tolerance and respect for fair play that marked the campaign, which is remarkable in Liberia's post-conflict circumstance.

News Media. The news media operate freely in Liberia. Under voluntary guidelines issued by the Ministry of Information and the NEC, the political contestants were provided access to the media to disseminate messages in the districts where they were on the ballot, and a number of debates were organized around the country, which provided citizens with information about the contestants and demonstrated that such events can take place without fear of violence.

Money and Politics. The NEC's Campaign Finance Guidelines are comprehensive though they have proved difficult to implement and to enforce in Liberia's conditions. Concerns were raised by some political parties that state resources were misused for the electoral advantage of several parties represented in the NTGL and that foreign funds were illegally channeled into the campaign. There were also allegations of instances in which political contestants "purchased" voter identification cards to prevent votes from being cast for electoral opponents. The NEC has an obligation under its Campaign Finance Guidelines to respond to allegations that are reported to it. There also were allegations concerning widespread efforts to influence voters through providing rice and other goods. However, civic education helped many voters understand that their ballot would be secret, so accepting rice or other incentives, activities that are not specifically outlawed by the Election Law, may have not succeeded in many cases.

E. Domestic Election Monitoring and International Observers

Liberian civil society organizations have actively monitored the electoral process from early stages, including voter registration and the campaign period, as well as on election day. Among the organizations involved in election monitoring efforts are: the National Committee for Elections Monitors

Illiteracy and other factors also contributed to a slow voting process. Large numbers of voters across the country seemed not to understand how or for whom to vote. Even after the initial instruction was provided to them by poll workers, many voters required further assistance in deciding which candidate to vote for. Presiding Officers helped them, but this raised questions concerning ballot secrecy and opened possibilities for some officials to influence voters' choices. It appeared that voter education efforts were insufficient to adequately prepare such voters.

The security plan developed by the NEC, involving the Liberian National Police (LNP) and UNMIL forces, placed teams at polling precincts across the country. This helped to provide a sense of security, as well as helping to maintain order over the course of election day and election night.

The Count. The counting process proceeded without major incidents in places observed by this delegation. The count was slow in many places. Transparency in the procedures helped to establish confidence, and party agents and observers were able to monitor the process.

G. Tabulation and Electoral Complaint Resolution

The tabulation process has begun slowly. The late finish and logistical difficulties delayed the transport of results to the county tabulation centers in many instances. Transport was done under protection of the LNP and UNMIL forces. The NEC projected on October 12 that the tabulation process, which will consolidate results from the county tabulation centers at the NEC, would take between three and seven days to complete. As of 11:00 am, October 13, 278 out of the 3,070 polling places had been tabulated, comprising approximately 10 percent of the vote.

and representatives of the international community. The delegation also met with the leadership of other international election observer delegations and worked closely with the European Union and the International Republican Institute.

On October 9, delegation members deployed to the following 10 counties: Bomi, Bong, Grand Bassa, Grand Cape Mount, Grand Gedeh, Lofa, Margibi, Maryland, Montserrado and Nimba. The meetings conducted in Monrovia were replicated at the local level by our teams. On election day, the teams observed the voting and counting process in more than 10 percent of the voting precincts and tabulation centers. Following the elections, the delegation members returned to Monrovia to share their findings and prepare this statement. This should be noted, due to the conditions of Liberia's roads, significant numbers of polling places could not be visited by international observers.

In preparation for these elections, NDI and The Carter Center conducted a pre-election assessment mission in September 2005 and participated in the May 2005 IRI pre-election delegation. Reports from this mission, along with NDI/Carter Center's periodic updates on the election process, can be found on NDI's web site at www.ndi.org and The Carter Center website www.cartercenter.org.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

We recognize that there are three types of recommendations that could be offered: 1) recommendations concerning the immediate circumstance in order to keep the process surrounding the October 11 poll on track; 2) recommendations that could be useful should a presidential run-off be required; and 3) recommendations that could be helpful for future Liberia electoral process. In light of the circumstances, recommendations concerning the third category will be provided in the observation mission's final report. The following recommendations are offered in the spirit of international cooperation and in hopes of building further confidence in the electoral process.

Immediate

National Elections Commission. 1) Procedures concerning electoral complaints and challenges of electoral results should be clearly explained to all of the political contestants and the public. An expedited process is necessary in order to deliver fair and proper redress and to avoid jeopardizing compliance with provisions of the CPA. This could be accomplished, for example, through the Inter Party Consultative Committee. 2) We welcome the NEC's commitment to release results in the most transparent and timely way possible in order to ensure confidence in the tabulation process and reduce potentials for tensions in the electoral environment.

Political Parties and Contestants. 1) Parties and contestants should call on their supporters to stay calm and patiently await the release of the results. 2) Parties should continue their active observation of the tabulation process at the county and national level in order to maintain their confidence in the credibility of the process. 3) If grievances arise, parties should make use of complaint procedures. 4) Those political contestants who do not win office as a consequence of credible results should publicly accept the results as soon they become apparent.

Civil Society. Nonpartisan domestic organizations should continue their efforts to impartially and accurately report on tabulation process and the handling of any electoral complaints and challenges in a timely manner.

International Community. International community should persist in assisting Liberian efforts in conducting a credible electoral process as appropriate.

If a Run off Is Required

National Elections Commission. 1) NEC and UNMIL and their domestic and international partners should redouble their efforts to provide voters with the information required for them to effectively participate in the voting process. The mass communications media including community radio stations should be employed in a nationwide voter education campaign. 2) NEC should instruct Presiding Officers that in instances where voters require assistance every effort must be made to ensure that the voters' choice is not influenced and secrecy of the ballot is maintained whenever possible. 3) NEC and UNMIL should continue the practice of regularly informing contestants and the public about administrative decisions and should continue its open attitude towards domestic and international observation.

Political Parties and Contestants. The candidates, in addition to vigorously pursuing support of voters, should proceed in the same spirit of tolerance and fair competition as was exhibited in the first round.

Civil Society. 1) Civil society organizations should mount a massive voter education campaign using the full range of methods including the mass media and personal contact. 2) Groups involved in nonpartisan election monitoring should extend their activities through the run-off and post election period.

International Community. The international community should make sufficient resources available so that, if necessary, a runoff election can be completed in accordance with international standards in a manner that leads Liberians to believe in the credibility of the election.

V. CONCLUSION

This has been the most competitive election in Liberia's history, with a variety of viable candidates vying for each office. Dedicated peace-building efforts by Liberians helped set the stage for these elections. Those efforts must now be reinforced by the country's political and civic leaders as well as those concerned in the international community. By their actions, Liberians have sent a clear message that the country must turn its back on war. Completing the electoral process in a manner that ensures the results accurately honor and respect the people's will is essential to ensuring lasting peace and democratic development.