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**AFRICAN UNION ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION TO THE 2018 RUN-OFF
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE**

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

Freetown, 2 April 2018

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The African Union deployed 30 observers, including eight (8) long-term observers (LTOs) to the 2018 run-off presidential election in Sierra Leone. While the short-term observers (STOs) will depart by 3 April 2018, the LTOs will remain on the ground until 7 April 2018 to follow up on the post-election phase.
2. The Mission to the run-off election complements its deployment for the 7 March 2018 polls. The AUEOM followed very closely the developments leading up to the run-off including:
 - The political campaigning which was at times characterized by negative ethnic undertones;
 - The High Court interim injunction restraining the Chief Electoral Commissioner and the National Electoral Commission (NEC) from conducting the presidential election run-off slated for 27 March 2018;
 - The ruling vacating the interim injunction;
 - The facilitation of dialogue by the international observation missions following the revocation of the injunction;
 - The explanation provided by the NEC on its level of compliance with the High Court ruling; and
 - The reactions from other stakeholders in response to the NEC statement.
3. Cognisant of the fact that the electoral process is still ongoing with votes being tallied by the NEC, this Statement presents the Mission's preliminary findings and observations up to and including the closing and counting processes on 31 March 2018.
4. A final detailed report including recommendations will be released upon the conclusion of the electoral process and will be shared with the relevant Sierra Leonean authorities.

II. ELECTION DAY FINDINGS

5. The AUEOM witnessed the Election Day processes at 156 polling stations nationwide where it observed the opening, voting, closing and counting procedures in rural areas (48.7%) and in urban areas (51.3%). The findings and observations of the AUEOM include the following.

(a) Opening of the Poll

6. Observers reported queues outside the polling stations at 92.3% (12) of polling stations visited prior to opening. However, these queues were not lengthy compared to the first round.

7. Observers also reported late opening at two (2) of the 13 polling stations visited, however, voting began at no later than 7:15 am. The late opening was due to poor preparations by polling officials. Furthermore, observers reported that voters were in queues for 40 minutes before voting could start **at Kroo Court House** polling center in Western Urban. The cause of the delay was due to the need to properly inform party agents of the voting procedures.
8. A peaceful environment inside and outside the polling stations at the opening of polls was observed by the AUEOM teams in polling stations visited.
9. Election materials were present at all polling stations visited by the AU observers except for the voting screens at **Konomyn Glory Park** polling center in Kono District.
10. The AU observers reported the competence of the polling staff during the opening process as largely good, showing much improvement from the first round held on 7 March 2018.

(b) Voting Process

11. The majority of polling stations visited by the Mission opened on time. Where the opening was delayed, observers reported that this was due to the late arrival of polling materials.
12. Observers witnessed voters' identity cards being checked against the voters register. However, at **Movement of Faith Primary School, Matham** polling center in Kambia, North West region, a voter without a voter card but with their name in the register was allowed to vote after party agents, local observers and NEC Officials agreed. In 5.1% (8), voters were turned away mostly for being at the wrong polling station or not being on the voters list.
13. In instances where assisted voting was required, the person chosen by voter and polling personnel provided the assistance in most cases.
14. While observers reported sufficient polling materials in all polling stations visited, **Simbakoro Market, Konomyn Glory Park, and Assemblies of God School** polling centers in Kono did not have voting screens, consolidated voters' register, and batteries for lamps, respectively. A station at **Court Barray, Yamadu Town** in Bo, was also reported not having batteries for lamps, rubber bands, and scissors.
15. The AUEOM observed no forms of irregularity during the voting process and were satisfied with the process and assessed it as generally good.

(c) Polling Personnel

16. The AUEOM noted that the youth formed the majority of polling personnel at the polling stations visited. They also displayed competence and commitment in the application of the polling procedures.

(d) Party Agents and Domestic Observers

17. The AUEOM reported that the candidates had their agents at all polling stations observed. However, at **MMCET Brookfield Campus, Jumu Kaneyata Road** polling center in Western Urban, Western region, some agents displayed inadequate understanding of their role.

18. The presence of domestic observer groups was noted at most polling stations visited by the AUEOM with a strong presence of women domestic observers.

(e) Security Personnel

19. Security personnel were present at most polling stations visited by the AUEOM during the entire process. In some cases, armed security personnel were found inside the polling stations with instances of interference at **ST. Charles Primary School**, Gbo in Kenema District.

20. Moreover, in **Dima Junction-Wahmann Abu road** polling center in Kenema, Eastern region, AU observers reported an altercation between armed security personnel and the NEC officials when they were denied the right to vote on the station due to the fact that their names were not found in the voters' register.

(f) Closing and counting process

21. The AUEOM noted that all the polling stations visited closed at 5 pm and counting was done in the presence of party agents, security personnel, domestic and international observers. The AUEOM also observed that the results forms (RRFs) were posted at polling stations visited.

22. During the counting and closing process, polling staff showed improvement compared to the 7 March General Elections. The AU observers reported that the overall assessment of the closing and counting process were very good in 38.5% (5) and good in 61.5% (8).

23. The presence of security personnel inside the polling stations observed by AU observers was reported. Their conduct was assessed as largely good and very good in some instances.

III. CONCLUSION

The AUEOM applauds the people of Sierra Leone for their commitment to upholding democracy as demonstrated by their patience and civil conduct on Election Day. Based on its observations and findings, and despite some challenges encountered during the pre-election period and on Election Day, the AUEOM considers the run-off presidential election of 31 March 2018 as largely peaceful and transparent until now.

The AUEOM concludes that the 31 March Presidential run-off election was conducted in line with the national legal framework as well as the regional, continental and international standards for democratic elections. As the NEC completes the final phases of the electoral process, the AUEOM implores all candidates, political parties and all Sierra Leoneans to preserve peace and security in the country.

Once again, the AUEOM congratulates the people of Sierra Leone for the peaceful run-off presidential election.

Freetown, 2 April 2018
Head of Mission
H.E. Kgalema MOTLANTHE