

**Press Release 038/2023**

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## **ECOSOCC holds Stakeholder Dialogue on the upcoming General Elections in Sierra Leone and awareness on ECOSOCC National Chapters**

The African Union's Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) from May 8-10, 2023 held a stakeholders' dialogue on the upcoming June 24<sup>th</sup> General Elections in Sierra Leone as well as an awareness program on ECOSOCC National Chapters.

In line with its mandate to promote and defend the culture of good governance, democratic principles and institutions, popular participation, human rights and freedoms as well as to ensure the implementation of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG), ECOSOCC, with the support of the European Union, through Expertise France held the Stakeholder's Dialogue on the Presidential and Parliamentary Elections in Sierra Leone.

ECOSOCC further partnered with the Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion (ICPNC), the ECOSOCC National Chapter and Campaign for Human Rights and Development International (CHRDI) to hold a stakeholders' dialogue in preparedness to deliver a free fair and incident-free election for the people of Sierra Leone.

Elections are increasingly becoming sources of tension and mistrust in much of Africa leading to an increasing lack of confidence in the elections processes, the judiciary, and other election management bodies. The belief that politics is a must-win game, and the winner takes all despite the implications of citizens' and institutions' actions on the moral and social fabric of society is a trend that has come to the fore in recent years.

"As a Government, we are very pleased that ECOSOCC has come with a clear mandate for your mission. Among the several objectives you have set yourselves are to facilitate dialogue between the election management bodies and CSOs as well as to assess the state of preparedness for a free and fair and incident free election," said Sierra Leone Minister of Planning and Economic Development, Dr. Francis Kai-Kai, in his opening remarks for the dialogue.

Dr. Kai-Kai assured the meeting that the Government had implemented all the recommendations which, the African Union, Commonwealth, European Union had provided from the Country's previous elections except those that required a referendum.

Some of the recommendations include: the election date was approved a year earlier to allow for political parties to prepare for the election; legislation for electoral reforms were passed; the judiciary was more responsive to electoral disputes; a multi-stakeholder elections steering committee was formed; ensured the electoral system-

the Proportional Representation - was adopted for the conduct of elections in order to minimise tension, ensure greater representation of vulnerable groups as well as minimise the cost (by obviating the need for bye-elections and violent campaigns); and the Government had taken the lead in election financing.

“The Government is very open and ready to engage on all recommendations that will make these upcoming elections free, fair and incident free,” he concluded.

Head of the ECOSOCC Secretariat, William Carew said the challenge of democracy and governance was not unique to one country stating that the AU recognized the role of CSOs in enhancing democracy in Africa and had put in place legal instruments to deal with the bottlenecks.

“The AU has been proactive in the development of legal instruments and policies such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. The AU has further gone ahead to establish institutions that will see to the enhancement and effective participation of African CSOs. A key game changer in this regard is the setup of the ECOSOCC,” he said.

Ambassador Salah Hamad, Head of the AUC’s AGA-APSA Secretariat said, “We are here to learn and share experiences especially since this region has experienced unconstitutional changes of government.”

He further called for the inclusion of women and youth in the election discourse with the onus on remaining a united and peaceful country.

Zaniab Moserai, Commissioner, Western Area Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone reiterated the Commission’s commitment to having a peaceful, free and transparent election. She urged political parties to share their ideas with the aim of putting the country first and not for personal development.

Moses Margao, Deputy Executive Secretary, of the Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion urged the law enforcement agencies and media to be impartial in their duties and give equal opportunity to all stakeholders involved in the elections. He emphasised that dialogue offered an opportunity to share ideas that would lead to a peaceful election.

The institutions will promote social cohesion by providing an inclusive space to convene key actors of government and civil society, as well as religious leaders both at the regional and national levels to facilitate platforms of engagement and forums for solutions in order to support concrete initiatives on the ground.

For the ECOSOCC National Chapters, the Executive Council of the AU tasked ECOSOCC to establish National ECOSOCC Chapters (National Chapters) through the development of an ECOSOCC National Chapters Framework. The framework is expected to be a mechanism for the accountability of elected members, serve as a conduit for the dissemination of information about the work and progress of the AU to civil society in each member state and to enable capacity-building and training of CSOs in member states.

On May 10<sup>th</sup>, the awareness program on ECOSOCC National Chapters to structurally formalize the establishment of interim national chapters and to enhance their engagement and collaboration with ECOSOCC, kicked off.

In 2022, as directed by the Member States, ECOSOCC conducted continent-wide consultations on the National Chapters and the draft framework was validated at the 4<sup>th</sup> Permanent General Assembly of ECOSOCC in December 2022.

Subsequently, in February 2023, the AU adopted the National ECOSOCC Chapters Framework to structurally guide the establishment of National Chapters in member states and to further guide their work in providing CSO support to the AU's national-level work. ECOSOCC has thus initiated the implementation of measures to operationalize the Framework in member states.

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**About ECOSOCC**

The Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) was established in July 2004 as an Advisory Organ composed of different social and professional groups of AU Member States. The mandate of ECOSOCC is to contribute, through advice, to the effective translation of the objectives, principles and policies of the African Union into concrete programmes, as well as the evaluation of these programmes.

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