



Press Statement on European Union (EU) Election Follow-Up Mission Report on the matters relating to the Electoral Commission-Sierra Leone (EC-SL)

The Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone considers the recently publicized EU Follow-Up Mission's Report on matters bearing on the Commission as not reflective of the Electoral Commission's account narrated during discussions with the head of EU Follow-Up Mission on the implementation of the Election Observation Mission (EOM) recommendations on the 27th October 2021. The Release is biased and influenced by repeated allegations against Election Management Bodies (EMBs) in a bid to castigate and derail the hard-won reputation and commendations earned over the years on the consolidation and deepening of democracy in Sierra Leone.

While the Commission acknowledges and enjoys the cordial partnership and collaboration with the EU Mission in Sierra Leone in terms of moral, technical and funding support for the consolidation of democracy and good governance, it is equally mindful of its constitutional mandate to the people of Sierra Leone in the conduct of free, fair and credible elections. We respectfully disagree, in no uncertain terms, with some of the findings in the recent EU Mission's report and considers it misleading to the electorates of Sierra Leone. The professionalism of the Commission's management and staff remains untainted, firm, trustworthy and reliable.

The Electoral Commission was established by Section 32 (1) of the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991 (Act No. 6 of 1991) with a responsibility for the **"conduct and supervision of the registration of voters, for and of all public elections and referenda..."**. The EC-SL has over the past fifteen years graduated from the stages of Reform, capacity development, consolidation for sustainability and strengthening of electoral processes for maximum performance.

Several other Electoral Observation Missions including Commonwealth, ECOWAS, AU, Carter Foundation and NEW have been submitting recommendations to the Commission for past elections conducted in 2007, 2008, 2012 and 2018; and these recommendations have not gone unheeded. The Commission has been working assiduously to either respond to the concerns raised or undertake corrective measures to remedy the situations. These include but not limited to Electoral Legal Reforms, Result Management System, Voter Registration, Stakeholders' engagement, Staff capacity Development and Information Communication Systems.

The mandate of EC-SL to conduct Voter Registration is clearly enshrined in Section 33 of the 1991 Constitution and not subject to the views of a Mission whose mandate does not supersede that of the Constitution. EC-SL and NCRA collaboration is ongoing and the Commission will act in accordance with laid down laws, regulations and procedures.

Under the new leadership in 2020, the Commission has made significant gains in the conduct of 14 credible, transparent and impartial bye elections and 15 Paramount Chieftaincy elections. These gains were not recognized by the EU Mission. Institutionally, the Commission has done restructuring in a bid to motivate staff and conform to international standards, global trends and the dynamics of EMBs. There have been marked improvements in Staff Conditions of Service, a move that has long been overdue, considering the high-risk factors and complexity of the work of the Commission.

Staffing at NEC since the restructuring process in 2005 to date has been strictly on entrance legitimacy, competence and performance and not tribal lines as in recent media output. These are mere insinuations to distract the Commission from the ongoing transformation to strengthen electoral processes.

We were taken aback on the EU Election Follow-Up Mission's focus on the conduct of the Local Council Bye elections in Koinadugu District rather than considering the national outlook or bigger picture of the Commission's activities in terms of successes and other programmes on course. The Commission acted immediately on concerns/issues raised relating to the conduct of the bye elections in Koinadugu District. The Investigation Committee has completed its report and soon to be submitted to the Board of Commissioners (with findings and recommendations).

The Commission in its briefing session with the Mission clearly brought out details on the status of the 29 recommendations made by the EU, among the 103 accepted during the Stakeholders engagement. Some of the recommendations have been accomplished while others are either ongoing or pending. Thus, the Commission, as a responsible and professional body has been on track in line with international standards and best practices.

The Electoral Commission remains focused, professional and determined to continue its good works over the years and maintain its hard-won credibility as a professional institution that is continuously striving to promote democracy, good governance and conduct credible, transparent and impartial elections in Sierra Leone.

The Commission continues to be mindful of its independence as enshrined in Section 32 (11) of the Constitution of Sierra Leone, 1991 (Act No.6 of 1991) which states "in the exercise of any functions vested in it by this Constitution, **the Electoral Commission shall not be subject to the direction or control of any person or authority**"; also stated in section 3 of the Public Elections Act, 2012 (Act No.4 of 2012) which inter alia states, "**the Commission is an independent body**".

