

**THE CARTER CENTER INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION
IN LIBERIA**

STATEMENT ON THE VOTER REGISTRATION PROCESS

March 3, 2017

The Carter Center deployed a delegation of international electoral experts to Liberia to assess the voter registration process and the pre-election environment in advance of general elections anticipated in October 2017, when voters will elect a new president and 73 members of the House of Representatives. The Carter Center delegation, which conducted its work from 9hSS

number of quality-control measures to detect and remove any multiple registrations. It is important to ensure the timeliness of this process, because these lists are what voters will review during the exhibition period. The exhibition and review period is an extremely important step in ensuring the integrity and credibility of the voter register, allowing for challenges and complaints, and normally should be finalized before the nomination of candidates begins.

The Voter Registration Process

The registration of voters is an important means to ensure the rights of universal and equal suffrage and should be made available to the broadest pool of eligible citizens possible without obstacles.¹ The rights of universal and equal suffrage are fundamental international obligations for democratic elections.

The voter registration period in Liberia is being conducted from Feb. 1, 2017 through March 7, 2017. The last voter register was established in 2011 and updated for use in senatorial elections in 2014. In order to ensure a voter register that is accurate and updated, and taking into considerations demographic fluctuations in post-war Liberia, it was deci

ensure that they had not already registered. Following the interview, registrants' details were collected by VRC staff, and forms shaded for later scanning at the data center in Monrovia. Photos were taken and ultimately printed to include one photo on a registrant's card and one photo on the registration form. Thumbprints were also recorded on both the card and the registration form to further assist in detecting and removing any duplicate registration forms. Registrants' fingers were placed in indelible ink to indicate that they had registered. The protections in place against the potential for multiple registration at both the level of the VRC and the national data center in Monrovia are substantial, and exceed international good practice.

The 2017 voter registration process includes some improvements upon past processes, including changes to the voter card itself. The orientation of the card was changed to help avoid potential for confusion with old cards, and additional security features were added to the cards.

Voter registration centers were equipped with necessary materials, including forms, tamper-evident envelopes, indelible ink, printers, cameras, and solar panels and battery packs. Two types of cameras were used across the country, including digital cameras that were used in 2011 as well as a smaller number of new cameras that were procured for this registration period.

NEC staff

Four NEC staff were recruited and trained for each VRC, including a registrar, clerk, shaper, and photographer. In all VRCs observed by the Center's delegation, the NEC staff carried out their responsibilities with professionalism, neutrality, and efficiency. The Carter Center commends the NEC on its efforts to recruit and train polling staff. The majority had experience from previous elections and were extremely professional.

Carter Center, the eligibility of prospective applicants was being determined primarily through a combination of interviews and social documentation.

In Liberia, NEC staff are in the position of needing to determine both the citizenship and eligibility of voter registration applicants. The law provides that eligibility can be established by production of a valid Liberian passport, birth certificate, original certified copy of a certificate of naturalization, evidence of renunciation of a second nationality, or other means established by the NEC. For the 2017 registration process, the NEC established that voter registration cards from 2011 and the 2014 update also could be used to establish eligibility. Although in some counties, service centers have been established that can issue birth certificates, these centers are not yet present across the country, and most Liberians lack identification documents. In several locations, observers heard reports of documentation being requested, including naturalization paperwork for a registrant or their father, as citizenship is determined based on patrilineal African descent. The Carter Center did not hear reports of any cases where prospective applicants were asked about dual citizenship, which is not allowed in Liberia.

Eligibility can also be established by the sworn statements of two other registered voters who appear in person and confirm an applicant's citizenship, or by a Liberian traditional leader who appears before NEC officers to attest to a person's Liberian citizenship. Carter Center observers also noted additional forms of social knowledge being used to establish the citizenship and eligibility of prospective registrants, including asking persons in the queue if they knew a registrant, and asking the applicant to specify their location of residence or to name a local elder. This practice generally was seen as credible by stakeholders.

Carter Center observers noted NEC staff exercising due diligence in determining the eligibility and age of prospective registrants through the interview process. Political party agents in VRCs also reported that NEC staff were effective in turning away registrants who appeared underage and could not verify that they had reached the voting age of 18. In cases where NEC staff were uncertain of an applicant's age, the applicant was asked to bring their parents or a birth certificate to verify their age and eligibility.

Amendments were made to the legal framework for elections in 2014 that affect the determination of eligibility, including provisions that a person must register and vote in the location where they ordinarily reside, and prohibitions against the "trucking" of voters for the purpose of influencing or attempting to influence the results of any election. NEC officials at the national, county, and VRC level have applied a no7(d)-99(a)4()-9(no7(

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right.³ Political party and candidate agents play an important role in ensuring the transparency of elections, building confidence in the process, and providing peaceful mechanisms through which complaints can be registered.

Efforts were made by some political parties to field agents to monitor the registration process. The delegation found that there was at least one party agent in 80 percent of VRCs observed, and in most cases there two or more parties represented. The Carter Center saw representatives from the Unity Party (UP) in 56 percent of VRCs visited, Congress for Democratic Change in 23 percent of VRCs observed, the Alternative National Congress (ANC) in 20 percent of VRCs observed, All Liberian Party (ALP) in 13 percent of VRCs observed, Liberty Party (LP) in three percent of VRCs observed, and United Peoples Party (UPP) in three percent of VRCs observed. None of them reported complaints about the process to Carter Center representatives.

Although the NEC provides basic training for political party agents in advance of election day, no training for party agents was provided in advance of the voter registration period. However, the NEC made a strong effort to ensure the accreditation of political party agents, even in some cases where political parties struggled to submit the required information in advance of the Jan. 20 deadline.

Looking toward election day, political parties are encouraged to strengthen their efforts to recruit and train party agents as early as possible. Carter Center observers also discussed with some political parties the possibility of using common reporting checklists on election day across all political parties to help ensure that party agents collect quality information about the integrity of the process and to allow political parties to compare information with peers in counties where a party may not have a strong presence.

The NEC is holding regular meetings of the Inter-Party Consultative Committee (IPCC). These meetings are well-attended, and appear to be an effective two-way communication between political parties and the NEC. The Center reiterates a recommendation made in July 2016 to continue these meetings with dedicated attendance by senior members of political parties, and to hold corresponding IPCC meetings at the county level.

In a July 2016 report on the status of electoral preparations, The Carter Center called upon political parties to respect amendments to the legal framework for elections that requires parties to endeavor to ensure that 30 percent of candidate lists are women. The Carter Center also called upon parties to reinvigorate the Political Parties Code of Conduct. As political parties prepare to hold their conventions and the candidate nomination and campaign periods approach, the Center again highlights these recommendations.⁴

³ U.N., ICCPR, Article 25(b); U.N., Convention on the Political Rights of Women, Article 2; U.N., Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Art. 29 (a)(ii). Unreasonable restrictions include race, sex, religion, ethnic origin, language, and physical disability.

organizations and community-based organizations. Further, a

his home with a camera and registration forms, and an investigation is ongoing. At the time of publication of this report, 40 complaints of registration being denied to Mandingo Liberians are pending (please see section below regarding participation of ethnic and religious minorities).

Participation of Women, Youth, Persons with Disabilities, Ethnic and Religious Minorities, and Pre-trial Detainees

Women. Liberia is a signatory to a number of international treaties that obligate Liberia to take specific positive action to ensure the equal participation of women in political life.⁶ To meet these obligations, Liberia should take steps to ensure that women participate equally in the electoral process as candidates, members of political parties, party agents, observers, poll workers, voter-education officers, and voters. In its July 2017 public statement on the pre-election environment in Liberia, The Carter Center noted that the underrepresentation of women in Liberia's government is

Youth. VRC staff are allowing those who are 18 as of the date of their registration to register. Youth organizations and some political parties have expressed concern that those who turn 18 between the end of the registration period and the date of elections will not have an opportunity to participate in the process. In future elections, The Carter Center recommends Liberia

ballot and mark their ballot in secret. However, education for both NEC staff and voters regarding the use of tactile ballot guide was limited, and Carter Center observers in those elections noted that blind voters continued to utilize assisted voting procedures rather than the tactile ballot.

The Carter Center welcomes the NEC's commitment to removing barriers and to facilitating unhindered access to the electoral process for people with disabilities, particularly the statement by the NEC in a Feb. 27 press conference that it will begin discussions with the disabled community on the reintroduction of the tactile ballot guide in Liberia. The Carter Center recommends that the NEC consider a pilot project to introduce tactile ballots, with a special emphasis on training for staff and awareness for blind voters to ensure that the tactile ballots can be used as intended and that the secrecy of the vote can be protected.

To further support the participation of people with disabilities, the NEC has instructed magistrates to collect information regarding the accessibility of voter registration centers and, where practical, to take steps to move registration centers to lower levels to improve access for people with disabilities. The Carter Center welcomes these efforts to promote the equal enfranchisement of people with disabilities. Half of all VRCs visited were inaccessible to people in wheelchairs. However, almost all could be made accessible with the addition of a short ramp.

Pre-trial detainees. Persons in prison who have been accused of a crime but not yet convicted have the right to register and vote according to the constitution and laws of Liberia. To date, provisions have not been made to ensure the enfranchisement of pre-trial detainees. Although it is difficult to verify the number and location of pre-trial detainees across the country, The Carter Center heard reports that some may wait as many as three years for a trial. In January, the legislature of Liberia conducted public hearings to consider this issue. While international human rights law and the laws of

Because the upcoming exhibition and challenges period will be a critical to establishing the credibility of the voter registration process, the NEC should increase voter awareness about this period, and political parties and civil society actors should make a strong effort to promote participation in it.

To advance the NEC's goal of making it easier for people with disabilities to participate in the electoral process, it should consider a pilot project to introduce tactile ballots, with a special emphasis on training staff and raising awareness among blind voters to ensure that these ballots can be used as intended and that the secrecy of the vote can be protected.

In order to further increase confidence in the electoral process, the NEC, political parties, and civil society organizations should increase efforts to conduct voter education and related information and awareness campaigns. This should include development of voter information toolkits for educators, and improved coordination among partner organizations and community-based organizations.

The NEC should continue to strengthen its communication strategies in order to enhance the trust, confidence, and transparency of the process.