

PRESS RELEASE

June 26, 2023.

WADEMOS CALLS FOR TOLERANCE AND TRANSPARENCY AMONG POLITICAL PARTIES, ECSL, AND CITIZENS IN THE ONGOING RESULT TALLYING AND DECLARATION PROCESS

The West Africa Democracy Solidarity Network (WADEMOS) commends the people of Sierra Leone and the Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone (ECSL) for conducting an election that was generally peaceful and calm.

WADEMOS urges all Sierra Leoneans to remain calm and patient and uphold democratic values as the ECSL prepares for the final declaration of the results.

The Network, however, calls on the ECSL to demonstrate transparency and the highest level of integrity in the tallying and declaration of results to increase public trust in the outcome of the polls as we move into the post-election phase.

Sierra Leone has held five national elections since the return to multi-party democracy in 2002, producing two electoral turnovers with power alternating between the governing Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) and the main opposition All Peoples Congress (APC) in 2007 and 2018, respectively. Hence, we urge all stakeholders, particularly security agencies, political parties, candidates, supporters, and the ECSL, to consolidate the democratic gains, uphold the peace and stability of the country, and refrain from violence in addressing election-related grievances.

WADEMOS also commends the presence of national and regional bodies and actors for their efforts and interventions, which restored and sustained a stable political environment before and during the election. The WADEMOS mission observed a highly charged political environment a few days before the election. This was heightened by the issues raised by the main opposition party, the All People's Congress (APC), for which they threatened to boycott the elections. This eventually culminated in a political protest and demonstration by the opposition across the country, with some reported incidences of violence. The Network, in its pre-election report and election follow-up statement, expressed similar observations and called on all parties to adhere to the electoral frameworks and mechanisms for resolving election-related disputes and disagreements.

Election day

The mission conducted an observation in some polling centers located in the capital city, Freetown. The team specifically visited the polling centers situated within Aberdeen, Victoria Park, and Fourah Bay College in the Western Rural and Urban Districts.

WADEMOS observed that generally, voting was peaceful and inclusive despite the late opening of some polling stations due to the late arrival of sensitive election materials. This delayed the close of polls and the counting of ballots after the voting process ended. In some cases, this led to unrest and discontent among expectant voters.

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We also observed long queues in the early hours of the election, signifying high interest from citizens, especially, among the youth. We observed a high level of security presence and visibility at all polling centers. Agents of the two major political parties, SLPP and APC, were present at most of the polling stations visited, along with the presence of local and international election observers.

While we applaud all voters for conducting themselves in an orderly and peaceful manner on election day, despite the reported cases of isolated election-related challenges across the country, we reiterate our call to the security agencies, ECSL and all stakeholders to act in a manner that will uphold the peace and stability of the country and enhance democracy in the West Africa sub-region.

About WADEMOS Network

WADEMOS is a non-partisan, independent, civil society-led transnational democracy solidarity network. The WADEMOS Network consists of over 35 Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) located in 15 countries in West Africa. The WADEMOS Network mobilizes, coordinates, and leverages the collective power of civil society and other pro-democracy actors, resources, and opportunities within the West African Region to advance, defend, and reinvigorate democracy and promote democratic norms and reforms in the sub-region.

The purpose of the WADEMOS Network mission to Sierra Leone was to support and extend solidarity to the National Election Watch (NEW), a member of the Network, civil society organizations, the media, and all stakeholders involved in the elections.

The delegation interacted with other observer missions, including the Commonwealth Observer Group, led by His Excellency the Former Vice President of Nigeria, Prof. Yemi Osinbajo, and the West Africa Elders Forum, led by the Former Nigerian President, Goodluck Jonathan, and engaged some of our members based in the country, including the Institute for Governance Reforms (IGR), WANEP-Sierra Leone, and the National Election Watch. In addition, the team engaged the situation rooms of ECOWAS, WANEP, and the Eminent Women in Sierra Leone on election day.

The members of the delegation were drawn from the Center for Democracy and Development (CDD-West Africa), Yiaga Africa, Nigeria; the Women in Politics Forum, Nigeria; the Media Foundation for West Africa, Ghana; the Center for Democratic Governance, Liberia; Stat View International, Guinea; and the Ghana Center for Democratic Development, Ghana. The delegation was supported by a team from the Secretariat of the Network, based in Ghana.

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