



## Media Reform Coordinating Group-Sierra Leone

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24<sup>th</sup> June, 2023

### MEDIA SITUATION ROOM REPORT FOR SATURDAY 24<sup>TH</sup> JUNE, 2023 (ELECTIONS DAY)

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This report is a synopsis of the activities of media practitioners/journalists across the country. The media performance is gauged against the provisions of the Independent Media Commission's Elections (Coverage and Reportage) Regulations 2022.

On a general note; the various media channels (Radio and Television) provided coverage of the voting process across the country; some in real time (Live); and others through recorded reports. The Independent Radio Network (IRN) provided the largest source of information with its member radio stations across the country covering and reporting on the elections.

#### **SOUTHERN REGION**

In the South, it is reported that there was little or no cause for alarm. Our monitors said that 'things are peaceful' and that there had not been any chaos or panic. They said that most of the radio stations in the district were linked to the Independent Radio Network (IRN) although there were few others that were doing independent broadcasts; and were conforming to the IMC Elections Coverage and Reportage Guidelines.

#### **NORTH-WEST REGION**

The Northwest Region; reports about alleged intimidations and tensions from political party stakeholders, (predominantly from the All Peoples Congress (APC) and the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP)). Three (3) radio stations (*Bankasoka, Kolenten* and *Lunsar*). *Radio Kolenten*, alleged that one Alimamy H. Bangura believed to be a member of the SLPP was disturbing the peaceful process; while in Lunsar, there were allegations about acts of intimidation from members of the APC.

#### **EASTERN REGION**

As far as the East is concerned, our monitors said that media houses and journalists were executing their duties professionally and that as at the time of the report, things were peaceful and normal. They said that the IMC and the MRCG have contributed to this for training the journalists very well, noting that no professional misconduct had been reported in the region.

A Social Media post by an APC Strongman, Dr. Richard Konteh, alleging that the APC Ward Coordinator, in Kenema was beaten by SLPP thugs; however, the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists' I-Verify team, debunked the claim as false.

#### **NORTHERN REGION**



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MRCG's Monitor in Makeni reported a peaceful and conducive atmosphere, around the city.

There was an alleged case of someone being in illegal possession of ballot papers; the matter was handed over to the police. All the radio stations in the City were broadcasting, in accordance with the IMC Code of Practice.

### WEST AREA URBAN

The Public Service Broadcaster, *SLBC TV* has a dedicated TV Elections programme. The programme did not contain any hate speech; or inciting or misleading messages or information, from political parties or their supporters. The *SLBC* hosted the Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone staff, explaining the reason for the delay in the commencement of voting in certain areas in the country.

*AYV TV* and *Star TV* transmitted the voting process, since the commencement of voting. *AVY* had an 'On the road' programme and reporters were seen covering different parts across the country.

*Star TV* also had a studio-based moderator, with reporters filing in from various parts of the country especially in Freetown. Both *AYV TV* and *Star TV* provided depth coverage of the voting process of the APC Presidential candidate and the Mayoral candidate comparative to the *SLBC TV*.

### SOCIAL MEDIA

MRCG Monitors, observed the misuse of social media, by both individuals and political actors. Throughout the day, social media was awash with videos, photographs and texts, making accusations and counter accusations. One of the most prominent claims include; a letter purported to have been written by the APC Freetown Mayoral Candidate, Yvonne Aki-Swayer, calling for the boycott of the elections. Fact checking organization, Dubawa debunked the letter as False!

There were claims about ballot stuffing, and other forms of irregularities around the voting process in some parts of the country. SLAJ's I-verify also published a factcheck on one of such cases where social media claims suggested that someone had pre-marked ballot papers in favor of SLPP Presidential Candidate, Julius Maada Bio. The verdict of the Fact checks; the materials papers were voter education materials and not authentic ballot papers.

### Conclusion/General Observation:

On the Election Day (24<sup>th</sup> June, 2023); the mainstream media (Radio and Television) acquitted itself with credibility and glory; through its Elections Day programming. The real test, however, for the media will be the period between post-elections and the announcement of the Results.