



## PRELIMINARY DECLARATION

### I- INTRODUCTION

- 1- It will be recalled that the Coalition for Democratic Change (CDC) candidate, George Manneh Weah, and the Unity Party (UP) candidate, Joseph Nyuma Boakai, emerged first and second respectively during the first round of the 2017 presidential election, which was held on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2017. As no candidate obtained the required 50 percent plus one votes for an outright victory in the first round of the presidential election, a run-off took place on 26<sup>th</sup> December, 2017 between the two leading candidates.
- 2- Against this backdrop, the President of the ECOWAS Commission, **His Excellency Marcel Alain de Souza**, authorized the return of the ECOWAS Election Observation Mission (EOM) to the country to support the electoral process and observe the 26<sup>th</sup> December 2017 run-off presidential election. The 35-member Mission was led by **His Excellency John Dramani Mahama**, the immediate past president of the Republic of Ghana and supported by a technical team from the ECOWAS Commission, led by **Her Excellency Halima Ahmed**, Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security.

### II- PRE-ELECTION ENGAGEMENTS

- 3- In the period between the two polls, a lot happened in the Liberian political and legal landscape. The complaints that arose from the first round of elections were settled by the highest court of the land, the Supreme Court. It should be noted that ECOWAS remained seized of the situation through the Office of the Special Representative of the President in Liberia and deployed a series of efforts aimed at supporting the peaceful resolution of the election dispute.
- 4- Thus, ECOWAS contributed in defusing tensions associated with the post-election disputes by deploying a High Level Mission on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2017 comprising of **H.E. Prof. Alpha Conde**, Chairman of the African Union and President of the Republic of Guinea; and **H.E. Faure Gnassingbe**, Chair of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government, and President of the Republic of Togo.
- 5- In addition, the ECOWAS Commission deployed a Technical Mission, which assisted the National Elections Commission (NEC) in improving the Final Registration Roll (FRR) in compliance with the ruling of the Supreme Court.

### III- ARRIVAL, CONSULTATIONS, AND DEPLOYMENT OF OBSERVERS

- 6- Upon arrival in Monrovia, H.E. John Dramane Mahama, the Head of the ECOWAS Election Observation Mission (EOM) conveyed the solidarity of the West African Community to the people of Liberia and encouraged all the

stakeholders to maintain the exemplary conduct exhibited during the 10<sup>th</sup> October elections. He held series of consultations including meeting with the two candidates, the Chairman of the National Electoral Commission (NEC) and the Liberian Inspector General of Police. The Head of Mission and the Technical Team also visited the Women's Situation Room and the the Liberia Elections Early Warning and Response Group (LEEWARG) in the Office of the ECOWAS Special Representative in Liberia.

- 7- Thereafter, the ECOWAS EOM co-hosted a coordination and information-sharing session for Heads of International Election Observation Missions with the African Union (AU). The session was attended by the European Union (EU), National Democratic Institute (NDI), the Carter Center, the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) Observation Missions, the delegation of the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and officials other Embassies in Liberia.

#### **A- Pre-Election Environment and the Electioneering Campaign**

- 8- As anticipated, the political atmosphere in the period preceding the run-off presidential election was characterized by alliance-making, with the unsuccessful candidates from the first round throwing their support behind one or the other of the two contestants in the run-off poll. The Mission also monitored the concluding phase of the electioneering campaigns.
- 9- Recall here that the Special Representative of the President of ECOWAS Commission in Liberia, in collaboration with West Network for Peace Building (WANEP), deployed the Liberia Elections Early Warning and Response Group (LEEWARG) comprising of 43 monitors in the 73 electoral districts across the 15 counties of Liberia. Following a briefing and orientation session on 25<sup>th</sup> December 2017, ECOWAS short-term observers were deployed to 7 of the 15 counties to monitor proceedings on Election Day. Having closely monitored the preparations towards the elections, analyzed reports and feedbacks from Team leaders in the field, the ECOWAS Observer Mission to the 2017 Presidential Elections in Liberia makes a Preliminary Declaration as follows:

#### **B- Opening, conduct of the polls and vote counting**

- a- Most of the Polling Places visited opened not later than 15 minutes after the official opening time of 8:00am; with an effective presence of representatives of both Parties (CDC and UP) in all the Polling Places covered;
- b- There was effective presence of Security at Polling Precincts;
- c- Voter turnout at the opening of the polls, compared to the first round of elections, was generally observed to be below, with an average of between 8 to 36 voters on queues. However, by the end of the day, the voter turnout had improved to about 55 per cent;
- d- On the whole, the processing of voters and the casting of ballots followed acceptable standards and were in accordance with the laws and procedures governing elections in the country. The improved management of the voting process, the greater familiarity of polling agents and voters with the process, and the vastly reduced number of candidates on the ballot paper, ensured a speedy turnover, with each voter needing about a minute to complete the process;

- e- The vote counting processes at the polling places were conducted transparently and professionally in the presence of the agents of the two candidates and some local observers (namely, Election Coordination Committee (ECC); Liberian Election Observation Network (LEON); Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR) and International Observation Missions (AU, EU, NDI, EISA, Carter Center, Japan and the United States Embassy);
- f- The ECOWAS EOM noted the circulation of fake news report of withdrawal of Unity Party (UP) from the run-off election and immediately responded by contacting the standard bearer and the executive of the UP. The party also made a prompt response on Radio to dispel the rumour. Moreover, the ECOWAS Mission was informed of an isolated incident of arrest of an individual by the police for possessing pre-marked ballot papers.
- g- This morning a debriefing session was co-organised by ECOWAS and the AU, which was graciously attended by all heads of International Election Observation Missions, EISA and UNMIL, where views were exchanged on their findings on the Election Day.

## V. PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

- 10- The ECOWAS Election Observation Mission noted with satisfaction the peaceful conduct of the 26<sup>th</sup> December 2017 poll in the Republic of Liberia.
- 11- The Mission urges the National Elections Commission to approach the concluding phases of the process with fairness, openness and transparency until the proclamation of results by NEC. The ECOWAS Observation Mission also urges NEC to work diligently and expedite action on the proclamation of the provisional results in order to avoid creating anxiety within the polity.
- 12- The ECOWAS EOM commends the CDC and UP candidates for their demonstration of statesmanship and exemplary conduct so far, and urges them to stay the course of restraint, legality and peace until the end of the process. The Mission also congratulates the other eighteen candidates and political parties for their role in ensuring healthy political competition and a peaceful electoral process. It urges both CDC and UP candidates, in particular, and their political parties and followers to accept the verdict of the ballot box as will be declared by the competent authority, the NEC, and refrain from prematurely declaring results of the election.
- 13- The Mission appeals to the candidates to gracefully accept the will of the people and in the event of genuine grievances, to resort exclusively to legal means to seek redress.
- 14- The Mission specifically congratulates the members and staff of the NEC for the measures taken to correct the shortcomings observed during the first round election and for the professionalism demonstrated throughout the run-off presidential election.
- 15- The ECOWAS Observation Mission warmly congratulates Liberians for their patience, determination and peaceful conduct demonstrated so far and appeals to them to maintain the same spirit till the end of the process. The Mission expresses gratitude to the Government and people of Liberia, the National Electoral Commission (NEC), and security agencies for creating the enabling environment for the smooth conduct of the electoral process.

16- The ECOWAS EOM urges all development partners to continue to provide more support to Liberia in order to ensure that the country maintains its progress towards political and socio-economic development.

**DONE AT MONROVIA THIS 27<sup>TH</sup> DAY OF DECEMBER 2017**

**His Excellency John Dramani Mahama**

**Head of Mission**