



LIBERIA ELECTION WATCH

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LIBERIA 2005 ELECTIONS

Voters in Liberia go to the polls on October 11, 2005, to elect a President and Vice President, 30 Senators and 64 Representatives. These elections will close a two-year transition period that began in October 2003 with the establishment of the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL). The transition process is governed by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), signed by representatives of Liberia's warring factions, political parties and civil society in Accra, Ghana, in August 2003. Election Watch is compiled jointly by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and The Carter Center.

Campaign Finance Controversy

The official campaign season for Liberia's presidential and legislative elections began on August 15, and in recent weeks it has been dominated by the issue of campaign financing. Some civil society and church advocacy groups claim the presidential and legislative candidates from at least six political parties have violated the law by using public funds, as well as government vehicles and communications systems, to conduct campaign activities. To combat the perception that state resources may be used for campaigning, there are calls for hundreds of individuals working for the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL), the National Transitional Legislative Assembly (NTLA), and public corporations to resign from those positions while they are running for office. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which governs the transition government and electoral process, precludes senior members of the NTGL from running for office, but does not contain similar prohibitions for lower level officials or members of the NTLA, many of whom are contesting the upcoming elections.

In an effort to prevent government vehicles from being used for campaign purposes, the NTGL has announced that all government vehicles in operation must be brought in for examination. Information Minister Dr. C. William Allen noted that it has come to the attention of the government that official license plates on some public vehicles have been replaced by private plates. However, the Minister of Transport said it would be difficult to determine the number of government vehicles in operation because his ministry does not maintain a comprehensive record.

The managing director of the Liberia Petroleum Refining Company (LPRC) and several company officials vying for legislative seats have been accused of using the company's finances

to support their campaigns. According to the Center for Democratic Empowerment (CEDE), an advocacy group, those accused of misapplication of resources include LPRC managing director Edwin Snow,* three deputy managing directors, and the chairman of LPRC's board of directors. LPRC executives are reported to be carrying out some of the biggest and most costly campaign activities in the country. LPRC has rejected accusations against it in full-page newspaper ads.

Campaign finance regulations adopted by the National Elections Commission (NEC) include restrictions on the source of campaign funds, prohibitions against bribing voters, and disclosure requirements that provide for all campaign finance information to be made public. However, many Liberians express concerns that the NEC lacks the resources to conduct discretionary audits of reports submitted by candidates, as provided for in the regulations.

The practice of donating money, rice, and other gifts to potential voters during campaigns has highlighted the need for further clarification of the definition of "bribery," which is proscribed in the Electoral Reform Law of 2004 (retaining the language from the 1986 New Elections Law). According to news reports, several candidates continue to donate money or other items of value to potential voters, and most candidates and parties prepare food for attendees at political rallies. While Liberians will vote by secret ballot, concerns remain that recipients of campaign gifts may feel obliged to vote for the candidates and parties supplying the gifts.

*According to CEDE, Snow's assets were frozen by United Nations sanctions, and he has been accused of siphoning public funds to former President Charles Taylor in the past.

Senatorial Votes

The Supreme Court of Liberia heard a suit concerning the electoral process for Senate candidates this week, which was brought by the Coalition for the Transformation of Liberia (COTOL) against the NEC. While Liberia's Constitution provides for the election of two Senators from each county, the Electoral Reform Law passed by the NEC in December 2004 stipulates that "Each voter shall have one vote." COTOL argued that the law should be interpreted under a "one man [sic], one vote, for one office" principle and that the NEC has failed to show that it adequately considered this approach. The Monrovia Magisterial Court ruled earlier that each registered voter should be allowed to vote for two senatorial candidates, and the NEC appealed that decision to the Supreme Court.

A decision in the case is expected next week. A ruling in COTOL's favor would require that Senate ballots be altered—and voter education be adapted accordingly—to instruct voters to make marks for two senatorial candidates.

Printing of Ballots

Ballot papers are being printed in Ghana and will be sent to Liberia by the end of September. The first group of ballots is *en route* to Liberia this week. The ballots feature the name, political party, party symbol, and photograph of each candidate. The NEC's disclosure of the country in which the ballots are being printed raised concerns for some Liberians. One Liberian advocacy group, the Coalition for Political Parties Youths (COPPY), threatened to challenge the ballot-

printing in court, arguing that it is unconstitutional for the NEC to reveal the location of the ballot production. The NEC has encouraged political parties to travel to Ghana to inspect the ballot printing process in order to ensure transparency, and some representatives of parties are doing so.

Replacement Voter Registration Cards

The NEC has organized a two-week voter card replacement session for people who have lost their cards. From September 17 to 30, registration cards will be issued only to individuals whose names already appear on voter registration lists. The replacement cards, which will be a different color than the original registration cards, will contain the label “replacement.” In order to safeguard against illegal voting, NEC officials will provide a list of all individuals who have received replacement cards to each polling place. Once a replacement card is issued, a citizen cannot use his or her original voter card to vote; all citizens issued a replacement card will be required to present their replacement card in order to vote.

National Democratic Institute/Carter Center Statement on the Pre-election Period

NDI and The Carter Center jointly sponsored a pre-election delegation to Liberia from September 1-9, 2005. The delegates’ statement can be found at: www.ndi.org and www.cartercenter.org.

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) and The Carter Center are jointly organizing a delegation to observe presidential and legislative elections in Liberia in October 2005. NDI is a not-for-profit organization working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. The Institute is also providing assistance to Liberian civil society organizations to conduct voter education and election monitoring activities across the country. For more information, please visit www.ndi.org. The Carter Center is a not-for-profit, nongovernmental organization, founded in 1982 by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, committed to advancing peace and health worldwide. In Liberia, NDI is supported by USAID and the National Endowment for Democracy, and The Carter Center is supported by the Government of Ireland and USAID. In addition, the Carter Centre U.K. is implementing an electoral assistance program along with the Electoral Reform International Services, supported by the European Commission. For more information, please visit www.cartercenter.org and www.cartercentre.org.uk.