

greatly from the security and support provided by Liberia's international partners, particularly from the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS) and from the approximately 15,000 peacekeeping troops of the

turned away in April from Guthrie Plantation, where negotiations toward disarmament are still continuing with a group of ex-combatants. NEC was forced to locate a registration site outside the property, and political parties report that they are having difficulty campaigning in the area.

UNMIL has taken steps to address this serious problem and this process must continue. We welcome the announcement from the new UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), Alan Doss, that these

it is not an investigatory body and that it therefore relies on evidence being brought to its attention in such cases.

In addition, five individuals seeking to run for president as independent candidates were not approved during the nomination process, which ended Aug. 12, because of failures to meet one or more of the technical requirements. Local media are still printing stories about this issue, and at least one of the would-be candidates is expected to initiate a court case. Several civil society groups also have indicated that they have not received satisfactory responses about their

to be commended for initiating an Inter-Party Consultative Council (IPCC) in March that is meant to facilitate regular dialogue between political parties and the NEC. These meetings have served their purpose well at times, but we understand that they are sometimes cancelled or delayed, and that party representatives' attendance is not consistent. T

from an abuse of state resources,” which contravene Section 6 of the 2005 Campaign Finance Regulations. It

voter registration cards in protest if their voting is not facilitated. It is not clear how much accurate information and voter education reached refugees outside the country, but turnout was very low, relative to other segments of society, during the extended registration period.

Section 7 of the 2004 Electoral Reform Law provides that the NEC is authorized “to adopt administrative and operational measures which are necessary and expedient ... to facilitate the registration and voting of those Liberians ... who have been displaced from their home communities ... as a result of war, civil disorder, or human rights abuses.” The NEC “shall also adopt measures to facilitate the registration of internally displaced persons and [refugee] returnees after the registration deadline where justifiable reasons for failure to register before the deadline are shown.” The Carter Center welcomes SRSG Doss’ recent reassurances that facilitating IDPs’ and refugees’ homecoming is among UNMIL’s priorities. The Center also encourages the NEC to consider any and all policies, given time and logistical constraints, to enfranchise as many IDPs and returning refugees as possible. If additional options are considered, the Center recommends increased voter education efforts within Liberia and refugee camps in order to ensure their meaningful choices about whether and how to participate.

4. Voter Identification Cards. The photo identification provided to voters during the registration process is valuable to citizens who, in many cases, have no other personal identification and went to considerable effort to register to vote specifically in order to acquire the multi-purpose identification card. Indeed, voter education efforts during the registration period emphasized this secondary benefit to registering to vote. Carter Center delegates understand that NEC procedures for polling day involve punching holes in voter registration cards in order to deter double voting. However, the use of indelible ink already serves this purpose, along with the presence of photographs and ID numbers on the voter registration cards. The Carter Center encourages the NEC to reconsider the card punching policy in order to avoid defacing the valuable identification cards it has provided to a population that often lacks any other personal documentation.

5. Hiring Polling Place Staff. With six people working as a team in most of 3,212 polling places around the country, more than 18,000 Liberians will need to be recruited and trained by the NEC and UNMIL as polling and counting officials during the next month or so. The Carter Center recommends that locally-based NEC officials and UNMIL officials work closely together to help ensure that nonpartisan women and men from the counties who speak local languages are hired to help ensure that rural voters can cast their ballots on election day.

Challenges for Political Parties and Independent Candidates. According to several standard bearers and party representatives whom The Carter Center met, the 2005 national elections already are the most competitive in Liberia’s history. Carter Center LTOs noted the presence of at least a half dozen political parties in all counties they visited, even before the campaign period began, and the level of campaign activity in the counties is increasing. We have heard the following issues from people in the capital and the counties:

1. Regional Assistance for Parties. It is encouraging that party representatives in most counties have indicated their desire for more information and control at the local level. Representatives from most, but not all, parties complain that local candidates were identified by their headquarters in Monrovia and that political platforms are being developed without consultation with county representatives. They consistently request more information about the Political Parties' Code of Conduct, the campaign finance regulations, and other election regulations and procedures. As campaigning extends to the counties, The Carter Center encourages parties and candidates to engage their local representatives and voters as fully as possible through consultation with those who understand local communities' needs best, including local candidate roundtables and other public forums, and interactions with local radio stations. The Carter Center also recommends that the NEC and political parties and candidates hold IPCC meetings in all counties, as some are already doing, in addition to the Monrovia meetings.

Section 15.2 of the NEC's Guidelines Relating to the Registration of Political Parties and Independent Candidates mandates that "Each political party shall ensure that 30 percent of the candidates nominated for public elective offices ...shall be women." A few political parties have made significant efforts to follow this guideline, but most have not done so. In the few cases in which women have attended meetings with Carter Center LTOs, they represent the "women's wing" of the party and/or remain silent. The Center notes that two presidential candidates and one vice-presidential aspirant are women, and commends parties that chose women to be more than 20 percent of their nominated candidates. There is still time for all

4. Training Party Representatives to Monitor Polling and Counting. Political parties and candidates are encouraged to begin training representatives in each county to monitor the voting and counting processes in as many polling places as possible. Carter Center LTOs report that almost all political parties are waiting for guidance from the NEC to get this process started. While it is true that the NEC ultimately must accredit all party and candidate representatives so that they may have access to polling places, parties and candidates should begin developing plans for recruiting, training, and providing resources for these representatives as soon as possible.

CONCLUSION

The people of Liberia have endured years of civil conflict punctuated by problematic national elections in 1985 and elections in 1997. Liberians have the opportunity now to turn away from this past of conflict, displacement, false hopes, and corrupt or violent leadership. The Carter Center expresses its hope that the 2005 presidential and legislative elections will reTm(a gTm(s ho)Tj10.98 0 0260.98 32ha5w 10.91001vernmor vs true th)Tj10.98 0