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Carter Center Reports Vibrant and Generally Peaceful Campaigning in Liberia; Urges Steps to Level Playing Field

Liberia's upcoming 2011 presidential and legislative elections represent a critical test for the country's transition from war to democratic and constitutional government. Carter Center observers report that campaigning has been vibrant and generally peaceful, and that political parties and independent candidates have been able to move freely and to convey their message to potential voters.

As election day approaches, the Center calls on all parties to reconfirm their commitment to nonviolent participation in the electoral process, to refrain from inflammatory rhetoric or other actions that could lead to violence, and to ensure that the message of peaceful participation consistent with the law is clearly and unequivocally communicated to their partisans at all levels.

At the same time, the Center has observed a significant number of incidents of opposition political parties being denied access to public facilities and of public resources being used for campaign purposes, in violation of regulations on the use of public resources included in the elections law. Specific incidents are detailed in the report below. While they represent important violations and should cease immediately, the Center believes that political parties and candidates have sufficient space to conduct meaningful campaigning in advance of the elections.

We acknowledge the National Elections Commission's (NEC) progress in delivering election materials on time and their ongoing efforts to train poll workers, and call on the NEC to ensure that poll workers are adequately trained and paid on time. In addition, civic and voter education programs should be accelerated, particularly in rural areas and the Southeast.

The Carter Center launched its election observation mission in Liberia in early September and has deployed eight long-term observers. The Center is in Liberia at the invitation of the NEC and aims to provide an impartial assessment of the electoral process, made available to Liberians and the international community in periodic public statements. The

Center assesses the electoral process based on Liberia's national legal framework and its obligations for democratic elections contained in regional and international agreements.

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A not-for-profit, nongovernmental organization, The Carter Center has helped to improve life for people in more than 70 countries by resolving conflicts; advancing democracy, human rights, and economic opportunity; preventing diseases; improving mental health care; and teaching farmers in developing nations to increase crop production. The Carter Center was founded in 1982 by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, in partnership with Emory University, to advance peace and health worldwide.



Carter Center Liberia Pre-Election Statement Oct. 3, 2011

Campaign Environment

Campaigning by political parties is ongoing, following the official commencement of the campaign period on July 5, 2011. The Carter Center welcomes the largely peaceful manner in which the parties have conducted their campaign activities throughout Liberia, and the enthusiasm of many Liberians to participate in the political process. Carter Center observers have witnessed campaign events in most of Liberia's 15 counties and report that parties and candidates are moving freely and sharing their message with voters. While noting media reports of two episodes of violence, including the fire-bombing of a Unity Party (UP) official's car in August, our observers have not encountered evidence of violence by parties or their affiliates. This is an important pre-condition for parties and candidates to be able to openly express their opinions and views with voters, and a positive sign for the remainder of the election period.¹

At the same time, observers have encountered numerous complaints from opposition political parties that their posters have been torn down and in some instances replaced by posters for the UP.² In addition, the Center was informed of an isolated case in River Gee in which several UP candidates allegedly sought to intimidate opposition politicians.³ As election day approaches, the Center calls on all parties to reconfirm their commitment to non-violent participation in the electoral process, to refrain from inflammatory rhetoric or other actions that could lead to violence, and to ensure that the message of peaceful participation (the UP) is parvJ0..dahes ansure that th)5(e m)816-1e2owing vPds1sdTjETd(ectoralarlsharinnt3oler

Misuse of State Resources

The use of state resources for party campaigning is a violation of the elections law and of Liberia's international obligations with respect to campaign finance.⁶ Political parties and civil society organizations have consistently complained about the misuse of state resources, especially government-owned vehicles, for campaigning purposes. At least one civil society organization, the Liberia Democratic Institute (LDI), has catalogued dozens of specific cases, predominantly involving the governing UP, but also the CDC, LP, and the National Union for Democratic Progress (NUDP).⁷ Carter Center observers note that the UP enjoys an overwhelming advantage in terms of campaign resources, and have reported seeing government vehicles being us

observers and others that the NEC's training must emphasize the rules for determining valid versus invalid ballots, as

activities in the counties, particularly in rural areas. Voter education work in the Southeast is almost non-existent. We call on the NEC and its partners to redouble their efforts to educate Liberians about the upcoming elections. This will be especially important with respect to the constitutional amendment, passed as a result of the national referendum and subsequent Supreme Court case on Sept. 20, 2011, that changes the constitution to require only a simple majority to determine the winner in legislative elections.

National and International Observers

Domestic observers from more than forty organizations have sought and received accreditation from the NEC to monitor the upcoming elections. A number of these groups observed and issued reports on the registration and referendum processes. We commend the efforts of Liberian civil society and their ambitious aim of deploying several thousand observers on election day, including 2,000 domestic observers under the umbrella of the

