



October 24, 2022

STATEMENT

The Decision to Use Proportional Representation System in The Multi-Tier Elections, June 24th, 2023.

The announcement by the Electoral Commission (ECSL) on 21 October 2022, that the District Block PR system will be used for multi-tier elections in 2023 has sparked feisty debates among members of the public. Given the contestations between political groupings on electoral systems and processes, the Institute for Governance Reform (IGR), the Fifty-Fifty Group (50/50) and Center for Accountability and Rule of Law (CARL) would like to proffer the following suggestions to Elections Management Bodies (EMBs) as they plan the procedures, rules and regulations for the newly announced PR based elections.

- 1. Legality of the Process:** Noting that the announcement came amidst concerns from sections of the population, including the main opposition All People's Congress (APC) and the National Grand Coalition (NGC), about the legality of the process; also noting that Sierra Leone is entering into a heated election period and the need to bring everyone onboard, we call on the judiciary to impartially and expeditiously interpret any suit filed with the Court challenging the legality of the announcement. Considering the growing political polarisation, a fair and balanced judicial process is integral to the legitimacy of the electoral process as well as the government elected in the June 2023 polls. There is need to ensure that all voices are heard and feel represented.
- 2. Citizen's Knowledge on the Electoral System -** A recent IGR report funded by Irish Aid shows that about 8 in every 10 Sierra Leoneans do not know which electoral system the country is currently using. The 50/50 Group found the same low levels of knowledge during nationwide consultations held with women on their understanding of electoral systems in August and September 2022. Considering this low knowledge base of the governance system among citizens, it is safe to conclude that applying the PR system for a multi-tier election will require a more robust civic and voter education than previous elections. For meaningful public participation, we recommend that ECSL and stakeholders consider working with CSOs and the media on public education on the electoral system, rules, regulations, and expectations.
- 3. Women's Political participation:** Section 58 (2) of the 2022 Public Elections Act says that "For every 3 candidates nominated under subsection (1), one of them shall be female." While this has the potential to increase women's representation in parliament from the current dismal 12%, we are concerned that in putting this law into effect in a district block system, women may not secure the intended one third representation in certain districts. This is because the 16 districts that form the district blocks have varying population sizes, and by extension, varying number of MPs. In the event where a district has 3, 6, 9 or 12 seats, it is easier to derive the one third. This is not the case for districts whose total representation cannot be divisible by three. In this case, women will lose out and will end up not being represented in adequate numbers as legislated.

To prevent this from happening, we recommend that a zipper system be used, and that ECSL, Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC) and political parties adopt a sequencing policy that places women first on the party list, followed by two men and that this be repeated until all possible nomination slots are filled for the district. In sum: woman, man, man; woman, man, man and so on. This gives an opportunity for women to have their fair share of seats in all districts.

- 4. Quality Candidate Selection and Citizen's Participation:** while we note the advantages of the PR system, it has down sides too. The PR system gives enormous powers to political parties to present the list of candidates for districts. Given the complex nature of the work of a modern parliament and concerns about the quality of debate and oversight in successive parliaments, there is need for clear rules and regulations that ensure that political parties do not settle for the bare minimum in selecting candidates. Rather, consideration should be given to the nominee's experience, capabilities, and their connection and work in advancing the interests of the people in their district.

In light of the point above, steps should be taken to guarantee citizens' say in designing the rules and regulations for the PR system as well as in the party primaries that will eventually derive the party list for each district block. The PPRC and the ECSL should therefore broaden the scope of stakeholder engagement to ensure that procedures for active citizen participation are adopted in the rules and regulations of the PR system and enforced.

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