

WEST AFRICA EARLY WARNING & EARLY RESPONSE NETWORK

WARN

Policy Brief

FEBRUARY 2019



SIERRA LEONE

**Polemics of Post-Elections in Sierra Leone:
Beyond the Rhetoric**



**WEST AFRICA NETWORK
FOR PEACEBUILDING**

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS FOR PEACE

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Polemics of Post-Elections in Sierra Leone: Beyond the Rhetoric

1. Introduction

On March 7, 2018, Sierra Leone elected a new President, Members of Parliament and Local Councils in the fourth multi-party elections since the end of the civil war in 2002. A total of 17 political parties participated in the elections while 16 candidates, including 2 women, contested for the presidency. Notably, the Constitutional provision of 55% required for presidential candidates to be elected was not met at the first ballot leading to a run-off. The run-off election was conducted on March 31, 2018 between Dr. Samura Kamara of the All Peoples Congress (APC) and retired (Rtd.) Brigadier Julius Maada Bio of the Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP). Brigadier (Rtd.) Bio won a majority of the valid votes cast by 51.81% and was declared the elected President of Sierra Leone by the National Electoral Commission (NEC). With regards to legislative election, a total of 132 Members of Parliament were elected on March 7, 2018 out of the 752 candidates fielded by 17 parties and 3 independent candidates were elected out of 40 contestants.

Characteristically, the parliamentary election produced a parliament where no particular party has an absolute majority, suggesting that consensus building would be a



The inauguration ceremony of the Rtd. Brigadier Julius Maada Bio as the President of Sierra Leone. Photo Credit: www.uncova.com

key tool in parliamentary deliberations and decisions. In the Local Government Elections, 2,741 candidates vied for a total of 511 elected local council seats including the chairpersons and mayors. The aforementioned, provided the impetus for a successful political transition with the

¹National Electoral Commission (NEC). Official Declaration of Presidential Run-off Election Results by Mr. N'fah Alie Conteh, Commissioner and Chairman of the NEC. Available at www.necsl.org (Accessed January 14, 2019).

²ibid

West Africa Early Warning & EARLY RESPONSE Network (WARN)

The West Africa Early Warning Network (WARN) is an integral part of the West Africa Preventive Peacebuilding Program co-ordinated by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP). Through its WARN Program, WANEP is setting the stage for a civil society-based early warning and response network in Africa with emphasis on human security.

WARN covers the entire Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region.

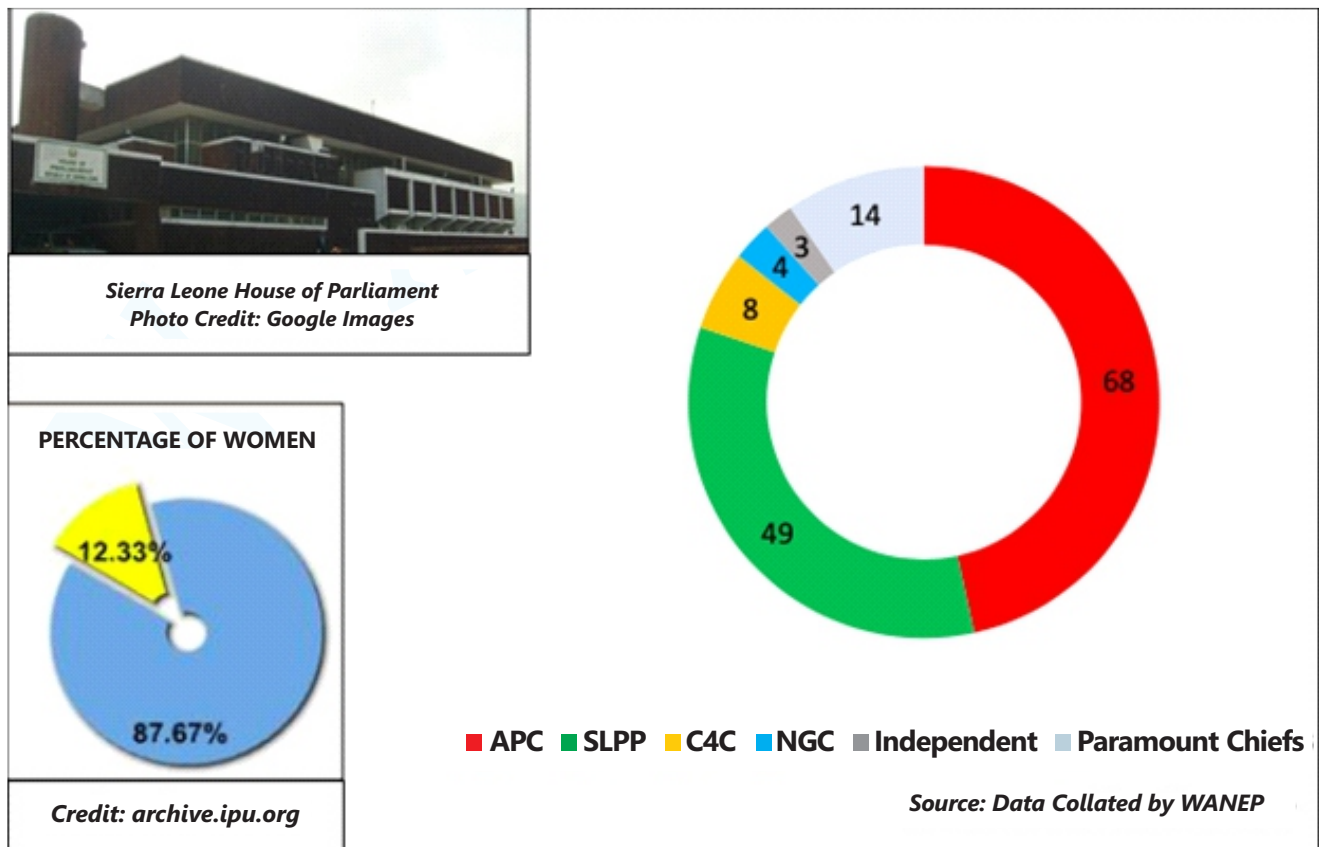
Since 2002, WANEP entered into an agreement with ECOWAS through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in the framework of capacity building in Conflict Prevention. One of the goals of

this agreement is to interface WARN with the ECOWAS Early Warning Systems to optimize early warning conflict prevention in West Africa. In view of this development, WANEP has been operating a liaison office located at the ECOWAS Secretariat in Abuja, Nigeria since April 2003.

In recognition of the role and achievements of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding in Africa, particularly in West Africa, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations at its substantive session of 2006 granted WANEP Special Consultative Status to the UN. WANEP is therefore mandated to designate official representatives to the United Nations in New York, Geneva and Vienna to further its advocacy and outreach strategies for peace and human security.

transfer of power from the ruling party to the opposition party on April 4, 2018. Remarkably, it represents an epoch and a milestone in the political history and consolidation of democracy in Sierra Leone. The outcome of the Parliamentary Elections produced a parliament where no party has an absolute majority.

Composition of the Fifth Parliament of the Republic of Sierra Leone (2018)



The chart indicates that the All People's Congress (APC) remained the largest party in the 146-Member Parliament (MP), while the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) remained the second largest, followed by the Coalition for Change (C4C), the National Grand Coalition (NGC), Independents and the Paramount Chief representatives. Of the 132 directly elected MPs 16 are women and of the 14 Paramount Chiefs, MPs, 2 are women³.

Though national and international observers described the elections as generally credible, there were isolated cases of irregularities and violence in some of the reports. There were also incidents of violence and stand-off between party supporters as well as party supporters and security

operatives before, during and after the elections in Freetown, Bo, Kenema, Bonthe, Tonkolili and Kambia districts⁴. While the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU-EOM), for example, acknowledged the genuine commitment to a transparent and inclusive electoral process by the NEC⁵, it noted that "the run-off presidential election, which was held four days later than originally scheduled, was marred by court petition for an injunction on the elections and divisive discourse fuelled by some politicians⁶". The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Election Observation Mission also declared that the elections were generally peaceful, fair and credible but expressed concerns about incidents of politically motivated violence, intolerance and

³Source available at: <http://archive.ipu.org/parline/reports/2281.htm> (Accessed January 14, 2019).

Press Release. WANEP Preliminary Declaration, April 1, 2018 (Accessed January 14, 2019).

⁴European Union Election Observation Mission. Final Report. Republic of Sierra Leone, Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Council Elections 2018. June 2018. Available at https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eu_eom_sl_2018_final_report_4.pdf (Accessed January 14, 2019)

⁵Ibid

⁶IGR. Critical perspectives of Governance Volumn VIII. Sierra Leone: Managing Elections in an Economic Austerity. September 2017. (Accessed January 15, 2019).

intimidation of political opponents. The African Union and Commonwealth Election Observation Missions also shared similar sentiments about the outcome of the election.

Pertinently, the post-elections climate continues to be marred by increased incidents of politically-motivated violence largely due to the rising scourge of political intolerance across the country and limited space for political dialogue between the ruling Government and opposition parties, especially the All Peoples Congress (APC). The rising tension and political violence continue to undermine human security, as evident in loss of lives, destruction of property and forced people to flee their homes.

From the foregoing context, this policy brief analyses the dynamics of the transition processes, the prevailing political, peace and security situation in the country, highlights factors driving post-election tensions and political violence in a bid for stakeholders to take early and timely actions to ensure continued peace and stability in Sierra Leone.

2. The State of Play of Key Institutions: Performances and Perceptions

• National Electoral Commission (NEC)

In a national survey of citizens' knowledge, attitudes and practices (March 2017) conducted by the Institute for Governance Reforms (IGR), 68 percent of voters expressed belief and trust in the fairness of the NEC to count their votes⁷. This suggests high-level of public confidence in the capacity of NEC to conduct a credible electoral process. The 2018 general elections, like many others conducted in recent history, recorded considerable successes as well as a number of challenges. In preparations towards elections, NEC raised issues around budgetary deficit due to Government austerity measures as well as delayed disbursement of funds for electoral activities resulting in overcrowded electoral calendar. It further decried the misconception around missing data on voter registration and the government's enforcement of the new administrative districts shortly after the boundary delimitation was concluded⁸. In spite of this pressure, NEC

was applauded for having facilitated increased access to polling centres in all parts of the country, stepped-up voter education, maintained a clean voter register, and delivered a credible election.

• Security Agencies

Security institutions, including the Office of National Security (ONS), Sierra Leone Police (SLP), and the Army were provided with logistics to address any security concerns that may have risen during the electoral process. Within the framework of the Integrated Elections Security Planning Committee (IESPC)⁹, coordinated by the ONS, the security agents ensured adequate preparations in providing election security. In addition, a comprehensive election security strategy was developed and implemented.

The IESPC, as part of its preparation, developed the National Elections Threat Assessment/District Risk Mapping for the 2018 elections which highlighted potential crime and conflict hotspots around the country. Based on this report, the ONS instituted a number of measures, including the ban on vehicle movements on the election day except for persons on election duties or individuals with NEC accreditations and vehicle passes to guarantee the security of the polls. In spite of this planning and high level professionalism of the security agents, the WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS) reported incidents of insufficient security personnel in some polling stations, and cases of deployed security personnel voting while carrying their weapons which created tension among civilians.

Similarly, there were reports of alleged intimidation of journalists and a lawyer by senior police officers at the Lumley Police Station in Freetown. These instances were perceived as lapses in the security arrangements and in the full implementation of the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for the 2018 elections.

⁷Op.Cit.

⁹The IESPC emanated out of national security directives by the former President Ernest Koroma to planning for election security. The committee's composition includes representatives from government's ministries, departments and agencies relevant to peace and security, international community, INGOs, NGOs, CSOs, academia and the media.

• Political Parties Registration Commission, Political Parties, and Candidates

Apart from its political education and violence prevention mechanism before, during and after the election, the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC) created an Eminent Persons Group to support its preventive diplomacy and mediation activities. The group, with technical support from H.E. John Dramani Mahama, former President of Ghana, had high-level dialogue with the leadership of political parties, which culminated into the signing of the Peace Pledge by the Presidential Candidates on February 28, 2018¹⁰. Despite efforts to manage intra and inter-political party disputes as well as contribute to peaceful and credible elections in the country, the Commission continues to be challenged by limited budgetary allocation from the Government.

In fact, 90% of the Commission's programs are funded by international organisations including the UN¹¹. Another major challenge of the commission is the weak enforcement and sanction of political parties flouting the Political Parties' Code of Conduct. For example, the alleged attack on a presidential candidate of the opposition Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) in Kamalo, Karene District as well as attacks on party members and property belonging to the governing APC in Kenema District, Eastern Region in February 2018, raised questions about the efficacy of the Commission in ensuring that political parties adhere strictly to the elections code of conduct.

• Media

The media played a very crucial role in the 2018 elections, especially with regards to reporting on the electoral process as well as monitoring the polls across the country. The media also organised a public debate for key presidential aspirants to give voters the opportunity to hear manifestos of the contestants and make informed decisions in the polls. In a consortium, "Standing Together for Democracy"¹², the Independent Radio Network¹³ (IRN) also collaborated with other Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) including the National Elections Watch¹⁴ (NEW) to

ensure parallel voter tally and simultaneous announcement of provisional results from polling stations across the country. Despite these positive comments on the role of IRN in the elections, some radio stations and newspapers were criticised by national and international observers for carrying stories and banner headlines that had potential to fan the flames of conflict, polarisation and tension in the political and security space of the country. It was also observed that interviews and responses from politicians even helped to reinforce stereotypes and created the conditions for mistrust, suspicion and tension among political parties¹⁵.

• The Civil Society Community

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) played active roles in the elections through advocacy for electoral reforms, monitoring of indicators of electoral violence and mitigating risk factors, voter education, election observation as well as promoting political participation of youth, women and the physically challenged. CSOs including the Inter-Religious Council and other faith-based institutions were instrumental in advocating against ethnic utterances and hate speeches before, during and after the elections.



The National Election Response Group (NERG) Meeting in Freetown
Photo Credit: WANEP

¹⁰Ibid

¹¹<https://www.pprcsierraleone.org/index.php/ct-menu-item-3/ct-menu-item-13> (Accessed January, 15, 2019).

¹²The 'Standing Together for Democracy Consortium' is a coalition of seven organisations: five Sierra Leonean - the National Election Watch (NEW), Campaign for Good Governance (CGG), the Independent Radio Network (IRN), the Institute for Governance Reform (IGR) IGR, 50/50 Group (50/50) - and two international organisations – Westminster Foundation for Democracy and Search for Common Ground.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴The National Elections Watch (NEW) is a coalition of over 300 local and international civil society organisations with focus on electoral management and electoral cycle observation in Sierra Leone.

¹⁵See: <https://www.pprcsierraleone.org/index.php/ct-menu-item-3/ct-menu-item-13> (Accessed January 21, 2019).

Various CSOs were also engaged in election observation and reporting. The NEW for instance trained and deployed 11,122 election observers in polling stations across the country on election day, as well as an additional 506 observers in sample polling centres to collect data for Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT). Furthermore, the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) trained and deployed 500 local election monitors assigned to districts identified by its National Early Warning System (NEWS) as hotspots. As part of a broader programme designed to mitigate election violence in West Africa through National Early Warning Systems (NEWS), WANEP in partnership with other CSOs managed an Election Situation Room (ESR) during the elections.

The ESR focus was to observe threats to the peaceful conduct of the election and provide strategic responses to prevent and mitigate election related violence. Additionally, the eminent persons maintained strong coordination with other ESRs including the ONS Situation Room, National Elections Watch Situation Room and the Women's Situation Room to ensure accurate information sharing and corroboration of incidents reported.

• International Community

The international community provided technical and financial support to NEC and other state and non-state actors to conduct a transparent, credible, and non-violent election. In the lead up to the elections, the community issued a joint statement¹⁶ calling for violent free and fair elections as well as deployed short-and long-term election observers across the country. These actions contributed to strengthening the credibility of the elections and in consolidating peace.

3. The Post-Election Context and Controversies: The Promise Vs Reality

Sierra Leone is still a fragile state and the current post-election context is relatively challenged by a number of complex issues. These include rising crimes, post-election political violence, controversies around the fight against corruption and the establishment of a Commissions of Inquiry to investigate cases of alleged corruption in the

previous Government, improving the economy to implementing the national development plan. The promises made by the Government while in opposition is now challenged by the realities of resources to execute them.

• Heightened post-election violence and political wrangling

There has been reported rise in post-election violence and intimidation, especially in the Western Area of Freetown and Bombali (Northern Region), which are strongholds of the opposition All Peoples Congress (APC) Party, as well as Kono and Kenema (Eastern Region) the stronghold of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP).



Post-election violence in Kenema, East of Sierra Leone

Photo Credit: www.africanews.com

In spite of the recommendations submitted by the Cross-Party Committee set up by the current President to address political violence and intimidations, the problem still persists. There have been accusations by the APC and other political parties of interference and manipulation of state structures and unconstitutional dismissal of public workers in various sectors in the country. Examples cited include the perceived ploy by the ruling government to influence the election of the speaker of the House of Parliament without the participation of the main opposition party, sacking of more than 106 workers in the former President's Office¹⁷, 91 staff in the National Telecommunication Company, the Ombudsman, among others¹⁸.

¹⁶A joint Statement was issued by the International Community comprising the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU), the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU), calling for a violent free and fair elections on 7th March 2018.

¹⁷Available at: <https://cocolioko.net/praises-and-ugly-allegations-fly-as-chief-minister-puts-106-more-state-house-employees-out-of-jobs/> (Accessed 04/02/19).

¹⁸Available at: <http://www.exclusivenewspaper.com/91-sacked-natcom-workers-to-be-reinstated/> (Accessed 04/02/19).

The President also suspended the boards of several parastatals and independent commissions, including the Human Rights Commission, provoking national and international criticisms¹⁹. In addition to this, the All Political Parties Association (APPA) has raised concerns of efforts to disenfranchise a number of Members of Parliament through the electoral court for alleged election related offences, increased level of political intimidation and violence²⁰. The Sierra Leone Police (SLP) and the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) have also been repeatedly accused by the APC of inviting, questioning and detaining their members for alleged public order offences, financial crime and corruption²¹.

Apart from this, there has been growing public concern about high handedness in response to unpermitted protests, raids on marijuana plantations that led to the death of a 29-year old man in Mile 91, North of the country in September 2018²². Another 29-year old man was allegedly shot dead by police following a disputed bye-election in Constituency 056, Ward 196 in Tonko Limba Chiefdom, Kambia District²³. The nature of police response against unarmed civilians has received public outcry and perceptions of ineptitude. Despite these developments, the ruling Government has continuously refuted these accusations and blamed the supporters and leadership of the opposition APC of distractions, in the face of challenges confronting the new Government to stabilise the economy and deliver on its campaign promises.

• Controversies around the Commissions of Inquiry

After taking the oath of Office as President of Sierra Leone on April 4, 2018, the President set up a Government Transition Team (GTT)²⁴, to conduct a stock-taking exercise of the state of affairs in various Ministries, Departments and Agencies. The GTT submitted its report to the Government on July 4, 2018 with several allegations of corruption against high-ranking officials of the previous administration and recommendation to establish a Commissions of Inquiry (COI) for further investigations. The Constitutional Instruments 64, 65 and 67 of 2018 which proposed the setting up of Commissions of Inquiry into



*(The three Commissioners of the COIs subscribed to oath. From 2nd Left – Right: Justices Biobele Georgewill – from Nigeria, Bankole Thompson – a Sierra Leonean Judge, and William Annan Atuguba – from Ghana)
Photo Credit: www.thesierraleonetelegraph.com*

corrupt offences of public officials and other private individuals mentioned in the Government Transition Team (GTT) Report²⁵ were passed into Law by the House of Parliament after the main opposition (APC) could not secure a two-third majority in parliament to foil the proposal.

This notwithstanding, the APC has described the Commission as a tool for political 'witch-hunting' citing violations of the constitutions specifically Section 150 of the 1991 on the establishment of the Rules of Court Committee prior to the enactment of the Constitutional Instruments; Sections 6(1) and 6(2) of the Constitutional Instruments allowing the Commissioners to modify, adapt and except himself from abiding by the practices and procedures in force in the High Court of Justice of Sierra Leone; and the establishment of the the Rules of Evidence in civil or criminal proceedings before the commencement of the inquiries²⁶.

• The Diaspora and Social Media

Incitements and inflammatory messages by opinion leaders, politicians and Sierra Leoneans abroad through social media and other communication channels are

¹⁹See UN Security Council Brief on 'Peace Consolidation in West Africa and the Sahel'. Presented by Dr. Mohammed Ibn Chambas, Special Representative of the Secretary General to West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) on 10th January 2019 at UN Headquarters in New York. Available at: www.webtv.un.org. Accessed on 22/01/2019.

²⁰All Political Parties Association (APPA). Press Statement. A call for national dialogue to ensure democracy, peace and stability are sustained in Sierra Leone. Released January 14, 2019 in Freetown.

²¹Ibid.

²²Source: WANEP NEWS 2018.

²³Ibid.

²⁴The Government Transition Team (GTT) comprises 12 members with the Prof. David Francis as the Chairman.

²⁵See Sierra Leone Governance Transition Team (GTT) Report 2018.

²⁶See APC Press Release on the Launch of the Commission of Inquiry. Published on January 29, 2019 at the APC Headquarters in Freetown. (Accessed 29/01/19).

contributing to heighten tensions in the country. Such misguided social media utterances linking the Commission of Inquiry and the fight against corruption to regional and ethnic cleavages has the potential to deepen the existing divisiveness in the country. This has raised a growing concern among the local population, Sub-regional actors and international community. Therefore, the Government and all political parties, especially the SLPP and APC must demonstrate leadership in this respect and make conscious efforts to denounce the perceptions of tribal and regional sentiments about the Commission of Inquiry. It is important that strong voices of religious and traditional leaders, as well as other influential figures in-country and in the diaspora be engaged to build consensus and common understanding of the Commissions of Inquiry and the activities of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) in their localities. They must also continue to encourage Sierra Leoneans to cultivate patriotism and embrace civic responsibilities in the interest of national peace and security.

3. A review of the promises and manifesto (key agenda of Government)

- **Economic Reforms and Accelerated Growth**

Sierra Leone economic growth decelerated since the onset of the Ebola outbreak in May 2014, slowing the growth rate from 6.3 percent in 2016 to 4.3 percent in 2017²⁷. Further, in 2018 the real GDP growth reduced to an estimated 3.5 percent as a result of decline in proceeds from iron ore mining which was determined by the decline of world market prices since 2014 as well as the closure of the main mining company, Shandong Iron and Steel Company in 2017²⁸. Due to the sharp economic downturns and “overspending” related to elections, the exchange rate has depreciated by more than 30% since 2016, and inflation remained high at an estimated 13.9% in 2018²⁹. In response to this, the government issued two Executive Orders aimed at restoring fiscal discipline and control expenditure, developed policies on duty and tax waivers, implementation of the Treasury Single Account, reduction in retail fuel prices waivers, among others, to improve the economy³⁰. Sustaining the current revenue mobilization,

crafting a revenue investment plan in line with its development priorities, and fighting corruption is critical to ensuring the country's resources are translated into economic growth that would benefit the entire population. In the same vein, attention should be directed to addressing economic inequalities, creating decent jobs for young people and their inclusion in governance and decision-making processes in the country.

4. Scenarios

As the political dynamics continue to unfold and the new government stabilises amid challenges, the following scenarios are envisaged.

Best Case Scenario: The Government decides to continue discussions with opposition parties and the general public to garner support and arouse their interest in championing peace and national cohesion, while the demands by the opposition party, the Sierra Leone Bar Association (SLBA) for an interpretation of the Laws on Commissions of Inquiry are being considered by the Court. Given the nature and sensitivity of the proceedings of the Commissions of Inquiry to the peace and stability of the Country, stakeholders agreed to pull through all odds, and support the Commissions of Inquiry. This consensus contribute to the gradual improvement of the country's security situation. The Government remains focused in implementing the pro-poor national development agenda with a national character and using the right-based approach. **(Desirable but less likely)**

Realistic Case Scenario: Despite efforts by national security agencies and other stakeholders to mitigate low intensive conflicts, politically motivated violence persists and the security situation in the country continues to deteriorate. As some members of previous administrations are being invited to appear before the Commissions of Inquiry, pockets of protests and agitations over the perceived 'witch-hunting' of Commissions of Inquiry as well as counter/pro-Commission of Inquiry protests emerge making the situation more complex to handle. However, heavy police deployments contain the

²⁷The World Bank – Sierra Leone Overview. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/sierraleone/overview>. (Accessed on 24/01/2019).

²⁸<https://www.afdb.org/en/countries/west-africa/sierra-leone/sierra-leone-economic-outlook/>

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰See Government of Sierra Leone Budget and Statement of Economic and Financial Policies for the financial year 2019. Delivered by Jacob Jusu Saffa, Minister of Finance at the House of Parliament on Friday 8th December 2018. Available at: <http://mofed.gov.sl/index.php/budget/speeches> (Accessed 26/01/19).

situation and disperse the protesters with little or no casualties. **(Likely)**

Worst Case Scenario: Irrespective of the call for the opposition to support the Commissions of Inquiry, the party prevents its members from appearing before the Commission of Inquiry. Enforcement of the Laws by the police to ensure compliance triggers protest from the opposition party supporters and members take an ethnic and parochial dimension. Joint Police and military operation (Military Aid to Civilian Authority – MACA) is deployed to restore law and order resulting into running street battles with loss of lives and injuries recorded. ECOWAS and the international community intervenes to mediate to restore normalcy. **(Very Likely)**

5. Recommendations

It is almost a year since elected, President Braigadier (Rtd.) Julius Maada Bio was elected president on campaign promises as stipulated in the SLPP 'New Direction' or 'The People's' manifesto. The manifesto has five broad promises to deliver on in five years. These include transforming the economy, developing human capital, improving governance, improving infrastructure, and improving fiscal policy and financial management³¹. Though the Government has started implementing some of these key deliverables such as the introduction of free and quality education in all Government and assisted schools across the country, step up the fight against corruption and indiscipline, protect children, as well as improving the health sector and service delivery, it is too early to give a comprehensive assessment on the status of implementation so far. However, there are concerns of inadequate funding and expertise to deliver on the set goals in the government's first year in office. This policy brief further recommends the following, in order to ensure stability and put the country on growth trajectory:

- The Government should adopt a conflict resolving architecture that allows for proper deliberation on key issues affecting the polity and strive to build bipartisan consensus;
- International development partners should supporting the Government with soft loans to the Government to accelerate economic growth in line with the vision of the

current administration;

- The Government should retool the security sector and ensure that it has modern equipment and training to perform its role and respond to emerging crimes and criminalities;
- ECOWAS and UNOWAS should continue to engage political actors and other stakeholders including CSOs and local NGOs in facilitating the establishment of infrastructure for peace to enhance reconciliation and national cohesion in Sierra Leone;
- ECOWAS/UNOWAS, CSOs, and other partners should intensify engagement with the Government and opposition parties to create a space for political dialogue that would contribute to mitigating rising tension and political violence in the country;
- The creation of a national Infrastructure for peace is imperative and desirable. The Government should ensure speedy and inclusive processes and actions required to establish an independent peace and national cohesion commission to strengthen national capacities for dialogue and reconciliation across the country;

6. Conclusion

The political climate in Sierra Leone is a mixed bag of occurrences. The outcome of the recent election produced a parliament where no particular party has an absolute majority which provides a unique opportunity for consensus building and inclusivity in governance and decision making.

However, polarisation of the regions along ethnic and political lines is contributing to the simmering tension in the country. While the responsibility to reunite the country lies squarely with the current Government, a space for dialogue with opposition parties and other stakeholders is imperative to rekindle hope and confidence of Sierra Leoneans within and outside the country. The Government should therefore prioritise improving the economy, implementing its national development plan (2019-2023), deepening accountability in governance, promoting peace and national cohesion. It is also imperative for political stakeholders in the country to engage in dialogue that would contribute to reducing rising tension, political violence and enhance peace and security.

³¹The Sierra Leone People's Party. New Direction, People's Manifesto (2018). Available at <http://www.thesierraleone.net/telegraph.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/SLPP-MANIFESTO-2-02-2018-PDF.pdf> (Accessed 26/01/2019).

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