

UNITED NATIONS



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UNITED NATIONS INTEGRATED PEACE BUILDING OFFICE IN SIERRA LEONE  
(UNIPSIL)

**Statement by Mr. Berhanemeskel Nega, Deputy Head of Mission and Chief  
Political Affairs, UNIPSIL. At the Opening of the National Commitment  
Consultative Conference on the 2012 elections - 26 September 2012**

Honorable Ministers,  
Most Esteemed Paramount Chiefs and Religious Leaders  
Distinguished representatives of the security sector, the electoral management  
bodies, the media and political parties  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me first and foremost to thank the Inter-religious Council of Sierra Leone and the Justice and Peace Commission for this timely initiative and for inviting the United Nations to deliver an opening statement. The Inter-religious council as a major stakeholder and moral guarantor in the Sierra Leone's peace process has been actively engaged in efforts at creating an enabling environment for peaceful, free and credible elections in November 2012. At United Nations, we are pleased to partner with the Council in promoting these objectives. With the elections now less than two months away, we must continue to seek the commitment of all concerned in ensuring the successful conduct of the elections.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

Indeed, the successful conduct of the upcoming elections, resulting in an outcome which is widely accepted by Sierra Leoneans, will be a demonstration that Sierra Leone's hard-won peace and the gains of the past decade have taken deep roots and are irreversible.

Another important aspect of these elections is that they are organized in a nationally owned process with Sierra Leonean's stakeholders, including its national institutions in the lead. That is why the inter-religious council and other non- state actors have been actively engaged in creating an enabling peaceful environment and prompting national unity and cohesion ahead of the elections.

The regional and district level consultations the inter - religious council and the national council of paramount chiefs have conducted during the past year are all part of such efforts aimed at ensuring peaceful, free and credible elections.

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Sierra Leone*

During these consultations, including at the recent national conference held on 18 September 2012, you have identified issues that require continued attention and have engaged key stakeholders to address them.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

As a manifestation of their lead role and commitment, Sierra Leone's political leaders, national institutions and civil society have signed on 18 May 2012 a declaration committing themselves to peaceful, free and fair elections in November 2012.

Since then, important progress has been made in preparing for the elections and implementing these commitments. These include completion of the voter registration exercise and nomination of candidates by political parties and other activities. All these were conducted in a generally peaceful environment and without major incidents. Political party leaders have also continued their extensive tours throughout the country without hindrance. With all these, and notwithstanding some challenges encountered, the electoral process is well on track and on schedule. This is indeed encouraging, and all of us should continue to uphold our commitments and work together to maintain the positive political environment and a spirit of dialogue and constructive engagement among all political actors.

In the remaining crucial period, in particular during the campaign period and indeed during the polling itself and subsequent important phases of the electoral process, Sierra Leone's political leaders and all national stakeholders, especially political parties, election management bodies, security agencies, the media and civil society organizations are all expected to continue working together and play their respective roles responsibilities outlined in the declaration.

The National Electoral Commission is the institution directly responsible for the conduct of the elections, with particular responsibility and roles in that respect. The success and credibility of the elections rests on NEC's ability to work with all the relevant stakeholders in a rather unique and complex electoral process simultaneously organizing four elections to be held on the same day. This would require continued engagement between the Commission and its stakeholders, particularly the political parties, in constructive dialogue and maintaining an effective channel of communication. The Political Parties Liaison Committee can serve as a forum for such consultations.

The role of the Sierra Leone police in providing an enabling security environment is critical. In that regard, the police and all security sector personnel must continue to remain impartial and professional in the discharge of their duties in order to build confidence in the electorate that they serve.

At the same time, it is important to point out that ensuring peaceful elections is not solely a responsibility for the Police and other security sector agencies but also other stakeholders, including political parties, have a duty to contribute to that end by controlling their supporters, instilling a culture of respect for law and order and abiding by the Code of Conduct for Political Parties.

The media has also a critical role and responsibility to provide accurate and impartial information to the population. It should play a constructive role in the electoral process and avoid inflammatory and divisive reporting and hate messages that could be detrimental not only to the peaceful conduct of the elections, but also to the stability of the country as a whole. In that respect, we call on the Independent Media Commission to play a more proactive role in working together with the Sierra Leone media and reinforcing the media code of conduct.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

We are pleased to note the active role Sierra Leone's civil society continue to play to ensure that the upcoming elections are free, credible and indeed peaceful. The Inter-religious council, women and youth associations, artists and sports organizations, the academia, traditional leaders, including paramount chiefs and soweis, and others have been actively engaged over the past years and continue to engage in the electoral process reinforcing the messages of peace, national unity and cohesion. On the part of the United Nations, working with these non - state actors is at the center of our election strategy and we are pleased with the progress thus far made in that direction and remain committed to continue our collaboration. Once again, much has been achieved in the preparations from the elections as a result of the hard work and dedication of all those involved in the process. However, challenges still remain. The prevailing calm political environment and spirit of dialogue must be sustained to address any challenges as we approach the crucial stages of the electoral process in the weeks ahead.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

With these remarks, allow me once again to thank the Inter- Religious Council and the Justice and Peace Commission for organizing this important national consultation conference of election stakeholders on the promotion of non-violent, free and credible elections, which I now have the honor to declare open, and to wish all participants very successful deliberations.

Thank you very much for your attention!