NEC Chairperson Declares Bye-Elections for Vacant Parliamentary and Local Council Seats in Freetown

Dr. Christiana Thorpe Chief Electoral Commissioner and Chairperson of the National Electoral Commission (NEC) on Tuesday 25th February 2014, officially declared Saturday May 3rd and Saturday May 31st 2014 as dates for the conduct of Bye Elections for vacant Local Council and Parliamentary seats in Ward 372 and Constituency 100 respectively in the Western Area Urban District.

The vacancy in Ward 372 according to a correspondent from the Chief Administrator of the Freetown City Council occurred as a result of the death of Councillor Mohamed Kamara on the 9th February 2014.

In the case of Constituency 100, the vacancy came about when Hon. Sheku B. B. Dumbuya, the elected Member of Parliament for Constituency 100 resigned his position as MP after he was elected to the office of Speaker of Parliament of Sierra Leone.

In another similar development, Dr. Thorpe also in a press release, declared Thursday May 22nd 2014 as date for the conduct of Paramount Chieftaincy Election in Tambakha Chieftaincy, Northern Region, Sierra Leone.

The release further stated that candidates’ nomination fee for the Local Council Bye Election was One Million Leones (Le.1,000,000.00) and that of Parliament was Ten Million (Le.10,000,000.00) and all fees were payable to the District Returning Officer.

According to the press release, the declaration was made after the NEC had collaborated with Officials of the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, the institution that is charged with the responsibility to coordinate local governance at chieftaincy level.

NEC Mourns with Bereaved Families of Late President Kabbah and Commissioner Jarr

The Chief Electoral Commissioner, Commissioners and some members of staff on Wednesday 19th March 2014 paid respect to the bereaved families of both former President Alhaji Dr. Ahmad Tejan Kabbah and former Electoral Commissioner Dr. Christiana A. M. Thorpe.

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The late President Kabbah died on Thursday 13th March 2014 at the age of 82 at his home in Juba. He was President of Sierra Leone for 11 years from May 1996–September 2007.

The late Alhaji Algassimu S. Jarr died the following Saturday May 15 2014 at the age of 76. He was Electoral Commissioner from 2004-2009. Since after his retirement, Pa Jarr as was fondly called was always willing to share his experiences with the Commission when called upon.

On behalf of the Chief Electoral Commissioner, Commissioners and entire staff of NEC, we pray that light perpetual shine on the faithfully departed and that God almighty will grant them sweet repose.

The Chief of Gender and Disability Unit Alicia Kamara and other representatives including the Hon. Minister of Social Welfare, Gender & Children’s Affairs Hon. Moijue Kaikai, formed part of a 15-man delegation from Sierra Leone that attended the 58th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) Conference that took place from Monday 10th Friday 21st March 2014 at the United Nations (UN) Headquarters in New York, United States. The priority theme for this year’s CSW was Challenges and Achievements in the Implementation of the Millennium Development Goal for Women and Girls. The CSW meeting was a dialogue and advocacy platform for the promotion of gender equality. The seminar brought together representatives of member states, UN Agencies and accredited Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) from all regions of the world.

Since its inception in 1947, the CSW has endeavoured to formulate International Conventions to change Discriminatory Legislations and promote Global Awareness on women’s issues.

In addition to the official meetings organised by the UN, there were opportunities for numerous side events organised by international NGOs, permanent Missions to the UN and other agencies, all geared towards discussing the CSW 2014 theme and highlighting and deliberating other critical gender issues.

The involvement of NEC serves to reinforce the importance of the strategic move by the Commission to influence universal challenges of female participation as a global issue as well as to contribute in the drive towards realizing the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) framework and stand alone goal on gender equality and women’s empowerment.
MY JOURNEY TO BECOME ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER – Commissioner Augusta Bockarie

Following the expiration of term of office of former Commissioner Florence Kula Kebbie, the former Chief of Procedures, Gender and Disability Unit Augusta Bockarie was on 3rd October 2013, appointed Electoral Commissioner of NEC by H.E. President Ernest Bai Koroma. The appointment of Ms Augusta Bockarie to the rank of Commissioner served to lend credence on the commitment made by President Koroma in July 2011 during the official opening of the NEC Headquarter building at Tower Hill where he publicly endorsed that professional staff can become Electoral Commissioners based on their dedication and hard work.

Emmanuel Lavalie (EL) conducted an interview with Commissioner Augusta Bockarie (CAB).

EL: When were you employed at the National Electoral Commission?

Commissioner: I started working for NEC in October 2005.

EL: 2005 – 2014 is such an electoral marathon which you have run; what stages have you gone through?

CAB: I was employed as a District Electoral Officer (Kenema District). I rose to the position of Senior District Electoral Officer, Acting Chief of Training, Chief of Procedures, Gender and Disability Unit and now I am an Electoral Commissioner.

EL: You came in as a District Electoral Officer but you are now the Southern Region Commissioner, what is the secret of your success?

CAB: Hard work, dedication, perseverance and a mind focused on achieving success are the corner stone upon which my promotion in the electoral work hinges. Since I started working for NEC, I have dedicated all my time and effort in ensuring that the Commission achieves its goals. I continue to be more dedicated to work even as an Electoral Commissioner of the Southern Region.

EL: What are the Challenges you are confronted with from then and now?

CAB: Every promotion in life is accompanied with additional tasks and responsibilities but I remain to be undaunted no matter the challenges. Looking after a Unit is different from a whole region as I am now placed at a policy making level. One of my challenges is to ensure that the staff in the southern region are committed to their work and ensure that the Commission’s goals are achieved. I have got that technical expertise as I have gone through thick and thin in the electoral work, so being an Electoral Commissioner gives me the confidence to work harder and help the Commission succeeds in all the facets of the electoral work.

EL: What is your advice to the entire staff of NEC?

CAB: To all the staff of NEC I implore them to be hardworking, dedicated...
the Tonkolili District respectively.

February -2014

On February 25th 2014, NEC declared dates for the conduct of Parliamentary and Local Council Bye elections in constituency 100 and Ward 372 in the Western Area Urban District.

Following the Makeni High Court Ruling on the Malal Mara and Yoni Chiefdoms Paramount Chieftaincy elections, the Commission however was concerned with provisions in the court Order that it considered to have the tendency of undermining the Commission’s independence and had resolved to appeal against the Court rulings.

The Elections Basket Fund (EBF) managed by the UNDP approved funding for the Commission to cover capacity building for staff and other programme of activities.

The Commission started departmental engagement for the development of the NEC Strategic Planning (SP) process for the 2015-2019 electoral cycle.

The Commission on 20th February 2014 presented certificates of commendation to 33 members of staff of different ranks from various Departments and Units at HQ as well as staff in the Regions and Districts. The certification ceremony was to extol the meritorious performances of these staff in the discharge of their duties for the 2013 calendar year.

The Commission in Collaboration with the UNDP, National Registration Secretariat (NRS) and other institutions have set up a task force under the UNDP support to “the Electoral Cycle in Sierra Leone on Legal Reform Initiatives” to assist the Government to set up a permanent consolidated, accurate and comprehensive civil register which can be used to produce a multi purpose national ID which can be used by NEC and other relevant institutions in Sierra Leone.

LEGAL ISSUES ON PARAMOUNT CHEIFTAINCY ELECTIONS - Chief of Legal Affairs

MAFORKI CHIEFDOM -According to the dictates from the High Courts of Sierra Leone, the National Electoral Commission will conduct the long awaited Paramount Chieftaincy (PC) election in Maforki Chiefdom due to a Court Judgment passed on the 15th March 2014. The said election should be conducted within two (two) months of the Judgment date effective 15th March 2014. According to the ruling, Eight (8) candidates in the Maforki Chiefdom were disqualified from contesting the election. The said candidates eventually filed in petitions against their disqualification. The matter was adjudicated and the High Court ruled that the Maforki Chiefdom was an Amalgamated Chiefdom for which election must be conducted on a rotational basis. Therefore, the election should be conducted devoid of the Petitioners’ participation because in 2002, only candidates from the Maforki Section were allowed to contest the PC election that was conducted. In order words, only members of the Beke Loko Section are eligible to contest in the 2014 PC Election.

LOKOMASAMA CHIEFDOM

In the case of the Lokomasama Paramount Chieftaincy (PC) election, the election that was conducted in 2009 was marred with petitions, court rulings and Court appeals that eventually culminated in another conduct of PC election on the 30th June 2011. The High Court ruling was thus: the Lokomasama Paramount Chieftaincy Election conducted on the above date was proper and that the elected Paramount Chief in that election should be recognised. The High Court gave the ruling that there was no need for a re-run of the entire PC election process.

On the 14th March 2014, the petition was dismissed and the High Court ordered for the immediate recognition of the elected Paramount Chief of Lokomasama Chiefdom as the legitimate ruler.
The 2nd session of the INEACE Diploma had already started from 10th February 2014 with a total of 120 enrolment drawn from NEC staff, political parties, the Security, Civil Society and the Media. Private individuals have also been enrolled for the 6 months programme that is expected to end in July 2014.

In attendance were the INEACE Academic Board, representatives from the University of Makeni (UNIMAK), Ministry of Education Science and Technology, Tertiary Education Commission, the UNDP and a host of other educational regulatory bodies. Also in attendance were Commissioners of the National Commission for Democracy (NCD), Human Rights Commission (HRC), Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC), National Electoral Commission (NEC) and a host of other dignitaries and invited guests.

In total, 55 students were enrolled for the 1st set of the Diploma programme of which 37 were from the FAWE campus based in Freetown and the other 18 from the Eastern Polytechnic Campus based in Kenema District.

With sponsorship from the UNDP, the
The National Electoral Commission in partnership with Gender Concerns International based in Netherlands organised a capacity enhancement programme for the Gender and Disability Unit and other departments within NEC. The 3-Day Workshop from 16 – 18th December, 2013 was facilitated by Sabra Bano and Sofia Charlemagne Gomez from Gender Concerns International. The objectives of the training were to contribute to the ongoing efforts of the Commission’s commitment to integrate gender mainstreaming within the institution; provide technical direction in reviewing the draft NEC gender policy and to provide gender mainstreaming tools of international best practices suitable in the workplace and for electoral operations and field activities. The training brought together 15 staff members from HQ drawn from various departments and units with provision for it been cascaded to other staff at regional and district level.
The NEC/UNDP capacity building capacity for NEC staff targeted Directors, Chiefs and District Officers and the trainings were categorised into the following sectors such as Development of Institutional/Department/ Timelines and Operation Plans; Electoral Logistics and Foundation of Assets Management Procedures; Electoral Best Practices and Methodologies. International tutors were contracted to facilitate the courses. The objective of the NEC/UNDP capacity training was to contribute to the ongoing efforts of the Commission as enshrined in its strategic plan 2010-2014 on Human Resource Capacity Development and in exposing staff to continuous development in meeting with challenges faced in the field of operations. The NEC/UNDP staff capacity building was carried out with support from the Electoral Basket Fund, managed by the UNDP.