

Democratic Government established in Sierra Leone

December 2005 - The May 2002 presidential and parliamentary elections and the subsequent local government elections in 2004 marked important milestones along Sierra Leone's road to peace since war broke out in 1991. Since then, the UN peacekeeping mission has worked alongside the new government to establish its authority throughout the country.

The elections brought about positive changes in how government institutions functioned and also encouraged communities, through elected councils, to participate in decisions that affected their daily lives.

Most observers hailed the 2002 landmark elections, managed by the National Electoral Commission with support from UNAMSIL, as successful. The UN Security Council was satisfied that observers were impressed by the Sierra Leoneans' determination to vote and commitment to democracy.

A dozen political parties – including the RUF Party (RUF), which had fought the government forces for a decade – fielded presidential and parliamentary candidates to run for office. The incumbent, President Ahmad Kabbah, won 70 per cent of the votes, Ernest Koroma of the All People's Congress came in second with 25 per cent, and the RUF candidate received less than 2 per cent of the total presidential ballots cast.

Of the 11 political parties that ran for parliament, only three won. The ruling Sierra Leone People's Party won 83 of the 124 seats, the All People's Congress got 27 and Johnny Paul Koroma's Peace and Liberation Party won two seats. The remaining parliamentary seats were filled by local chiefs.

The voting was held in a remarkably peaceful atmosphere, with no reported incidents of violence. More than 1.9 million voters showed up at the polls, an 81 per cent turn out.

During the period leading up to the elections, UNAMSIL deployed thousands of troops throughout the country to provide security, and assisted the Sierra Leone Police in deploying officers and mobile armed units. It also provided critical logistical support to the National Electoral Commission, and along with the UN Country Team, gave similar support to national and international electoral observers. The Mission helped the NEC with voter education and on polling day deployed reporters to all electoral districts, while Radio UNAMSIL provided 24-hour news coverage on the elections.

UNDP gave money to ECOWAS (Economic Commission for West African States) and the former Organization of African Unity (now African Union) to bring observers and pay for 12,000 ballot boxes, as well as vital communications equipment for the NEC and the police. UNAMSIL's electoral component closely monitored the electoral process and reported on key issues, which enabled the Mission to advise the NEC to correct shortcomings.

Local and international election observers from the Commonwealth, the European Union, the OAU, ECOWAS, and the Carter Centre declared the elections as free, transparent and generally violence-free. All the opposition political parties, including the RUF, accepted the election results and promised to work with President Kabbah to rebuild the country.

For further information

UNAMSIL (Freetown, Sierra Leone):

*Sheila Dallas, Officer-in-Charge, Public Information Section, Tel: +1 212 963 9588, ext. 6583, E-mail: dallas@un.org;
Daniel Adekera, Spokesman, Tel: +1 212 963 6588, ext. 6817, E-mail: adekera@un.org*

United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (New York):

Nick Birnback, External Relations/Media Affairs Officer, Phone: 1-917-367-5044, E-mail: birnbackn@un.org

United Nations Department of Public Information (New York): Susan Manuel, Chief, Peace and Security Section, Phone: 1-212-963-1262, E-mail: manuel@un.org

For more information on UNAMSIL, visit the UN website at: <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/unamsil/>