



October 13, 2011

## Press Statement

**By the Joint Mano River Women Peace Network (MARWOPNET), Angie Brooks International Centre (ABIC) and Femmes Africa Solidarite (FAS) Observation Team for the October 11, 2011 Presidential and Legislative Elections in Liberia**

The Mano River Women Peace Network (MARWOPNET) is a network of women organizations and groups in the four countries of the Mano River Union namely; Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, working for sustainable peace in the Mano River sub-region since 2000 and has fielded elections observer missions in various countries in the region since its formation.

The Angie Brooks International Centre for Women's Empowerment, Leadership Development, International Peace and Security (ABIC) is a concrete outcome of the International Women's Colloquium held in Liberia in March 2009. The Centre has over the years trained women from the Mano River Union Countries in the areas of peace building and leadership development in line with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325.

Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS) is a women's organization founded in June 1996 by African women leaders from different professions. The vision of FAS is to promote development and the leadership and inclusion of African women in preventing, managing and resolving conflicts. FAS' missions are both to enable grassroots women campaigners in peace building and development in Africa to have a greater impact at the policy and decision-making level; and to advance the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and further UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and the UN Millennium Development Goals (2000).

MARWOPNET, ABIC and FAS are collaborating to observe the Presidential and Legislative Elections in Liberia in a bid to ensure free, fair, transparent and non-violent elections process. Towards this end, MARWOPNET, ABIC and FAS obtained accreditations with the National Elections Commission (NEC) to serve as national and international observers.

During the run-up to the elections, MARWOPNET, ABIC, FAS and other women organizations held several consultative meetings with various political parties, government agencies, youth and student groups, the President of the ECOWAS commission, His Excellency Victor Gbeho as well as joint special envoys of President Goodluck Jonathan, Chairman of ECOWAS; H. E. John Kufour, Former President of the Republic of Ghana and H. E. General Abdulsalami Abubakar, Former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to advocate for peaceful and violence free polls. MARWOPNET, ABIC and FAS trained over 130 national and international observers, who were deployed in and reported from 9 counties.

While in the field our observers were supported by the MARWOPNET/ABIC/FAS Situation Room that was staffed throughout the day and most of the night by experienced, eminent and knowledgeable personalities who were able to advise observers on issues emerging during the

course of the election, relay concerns to NEC and resolve every reported incident appropriately. MARWOPNET, ABIC and FAS have also closely followed the activities and initial reports by other observer teams including ECOWAS.

As the process continues MARWOPNET, ABIC and FAS have noted the

- Patience and passionate commitment of the electorate to exercise their franchise despite the downpour of rain;
- Compliance with the constitutional provisions and the electoral laws
- Punctual start and close of the polls,
- the widespread availability of polling materials and equipment,
- the calm and friendly atmosphere at almost all precincts,
- accessibility of polling places
- professionalism and helpfulness of the NEC staff and security officers
- patriotism and neutrality of the vast majority of the media.

Based on the above and on the preliminary findings of our observers, MARWOPNET, ABIC and FAS congratulate the NEC, all the political parties and independent candidates and most importantly the people of Liberia for the peaceful and orderly way these elections were conducted. Our preliminary findings indicate a massive turn-out and that the process was generally FREE and FAIR and provided the Liberian people with the opportunity to exercise their rights to choose their leaders without FEAR. There were no reports of violence anywhere and so far and as the counting continues, MARWOPNET, ABIC and FAS have not come across any major challenge that would change the peaceful nature this process has witnessed.

MARWOPNET, ABIC and FAS are deeply encouraged by the full involvement of young people in the electoral process as poll workers, party agents, elections observers, media practitioners, security personnel and voters, which is a credit to Liberia and a hopeful sign of a brighter future for the entire Mano River sub-region. Interestingly, these young people were not just enthusiastic to participate in the electoral process but comported themselves in a mature and responsible manner, which other countries in the sub-region could learn from.

MARWOPNET, ABIC and FAS are also encouraged by the increase in the number of female electoral staff over past elections although further efforts should be made by NEC to ensure more women staff especially in the rural voting precincts in future elections

Another important observation from our observers is that the voting process was slow, which when combined with the rain caused long queues in many areas. However, this time taken was necessary in order to ensure that every voter had the opportunity to vote freely and select correctly the candidate of their choice. Therefore in the view of MARWOPNET, ABIC and FAS this was time well spent.

Concern was also expressed at the slow pace of the counting process. This was caused by electoral staff strictly adhering to NEC's regulations to ensure transparency and credibility of the count and the result. The fact that we have not heard of any report that any tally sheet was rejected by a party agent or observer is a further confirmation of the credibility of the elections process.

Our observer teams came across few challenges including the insufficient lighting system during the counting of the votes. During future elections, NEC should ensure that the counting places are very well lit to avoid unnecessary delay and maintain the good trend of transparency. The sizes and locations of some of the polling places were also a challenge and

this issue will also need to be addressed by NEC. Details of other challenges encountered and suggestions for improvement will be included in our final report.

MARWOPNET and ABIC express sincere gratitude to UNDP and Femmes- Africa - Solidarite (FAS) for their support, without which this election observation exercise would not have been possible. We are grateful to FAS for ensuring that we can maintain our excellent record of observing elections throughout the Mano River countries and to UNDP for the innovation of the Situation Room which we hope we will be able to replicate in future election observer missions

Finally ABIC, MARWOPNET and FAS call on all Liberians (particularly all candidates and contestants) to accept the final outcome of this election process and to avoid any action or statement that will in any way detract from the Liberian People's great achievement of Peaceful, Free and Fair elections in October 2011.