



Embassy of the United States of America
Public Affairs Office

PRESS RELEASE

Freetown

October 16, 2012

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U.S. Embassy and British High Commission Optimistic for Peaceful Elections

FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE – On the eve of the official campaign season kickoff in Sierra Leone, the United States Embassy and British High Commission expressed their well wishes to Sierra Leone for free, fair and peaceful elections.

At a press conference on October 16 at the U.S. Embassy in Freetown, U.S. Ambassador Michael Owen and British High Commissioner Ian Hughes also shared the work their two governments have done in assisting various segments of Sierra Leone government and civil society prepare for the elections.

Ambassador Owen noted the U.S. government's commitment to support Sierra Leone's effort for free, fair and non-violent elections but pointed out that while the international community was more deeply engaged in previous elections, it is now Sierra Leone's time to take the lead in completing the successful transformation into democracy. Ambassador Owen said, "We shouldn't underestimate the progress that Sierra Leone has already made." To ensure Sierra Leone makes the successful transition, the U.S. has provided more than \$4.3 million to strengthen electoral institutions and elections-related programs in Sierra Leone. Ambassador Owen expressed satisfaction over the progress that Sierra Leone has made in its elections preparations.

British High Commissioner Hughes highlighted his government's financial support towards preparing Sierra Leone for its upcoming elections. He disclosed that they have provided \$3 million for civil society monitoring, engagement and observation. This is alongside a further \$20 million provided to the elections Basket Fund to support the entire electoral cycle. He affirmed: "Democracy is not elections. Democracy is the dialogue between people and between those people and their government." He reiterated the importance of credible, fair and transparent elections which he said would determine how much progress Sierra Leone has made within the last 12 years.

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Journalists, members of civil society, and other key stakeholders in the electioneering process attended the press conference. Questions from invited guests and journalists climaxed the press conference.

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