

REMARKS TO THE PRESS

Visit to Sierra Leone of Mohamed Ibn Chambas, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel

22 to 26 February 2017

Following on my previous visit to Sierra Leone in November last year, I have just concluded a five day visit in order to continue consultations on preparations for the presidential and parliamentary elections announced to take place on 7 March 2018. I wish to commend His Excellency the President for his timely action in announcing the date for the parliamentary and local elections.

I had a fruitful exchange of views with all national stakeholders on the level of preparedness and the challenges to the electoral process, and how the United Nations and partners could accompany the people of Sierra Leone at this important juncture in the country's democratic journey.

It is significant to note that Sierra Leone's 2018 elections will come at the end of a series of successful elections in West Africa. Most recently, the people of the Gambia freely expressed their political aspirations, and I commend ECOWAS, the AU, and the international community for supporting the country to achieve a peaceful transition.

During my visit, I held consultations with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the Minister of Internal Affairs, the Attorney General and Minister of Justice, and members of the Diplomatic Corps. In addition, I met with National Commissions, including the National Electoral Commission, which has the responsibility for the organization of the polls. I also exchanged views with political parties and members of civil society. I was received in audience by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, whom I briefed on my exchanges.

In the course of my discussions, I underlined the confidence of the Secretary-General of the United Nations in Sierra Leone's democratic system and its capacity to organize peaceful, credible, and participatory elections, like in 2012. In this vein, it will be important to scale up preparations in order to meet all required timelines.

I expressed my conviction that Sierra Leone will maintain a conducive environment for transparent, peaceful, and credible polls in 2018.

In this regard I wish to encourage further outreach efforts and dialogue between political actors and other stakeholders, in an atmosphere of freedom and openness. I equally urge civil society, the private sector as well as the media to be aware of their important roles, and call upon youth and women to participate actively.

On their part, security services should undertake their responsibilities for securing the electoral process and protecting political activists and leaders with professionalism and impartiality.

In the coming weeks, it is important that concrete actions be taken to conclude the process towards constitutional reform, confirm a chronogram for the elections, and assure means for adequate funding in order that the process stays on track and within constitutional deadlines.

The United Nations will pursue its collaboration with the people of Sierra Leone, whom I would like to commend for their resilience displayed during times of hardship. At this crucial moment, we are confident that the upcoming polls will mark another milestone in Sierra Leone's aspiration for the consolidation of democratic governance and sustainable development.

I thank you very much for your attention.

Freetown, 26 February 2017