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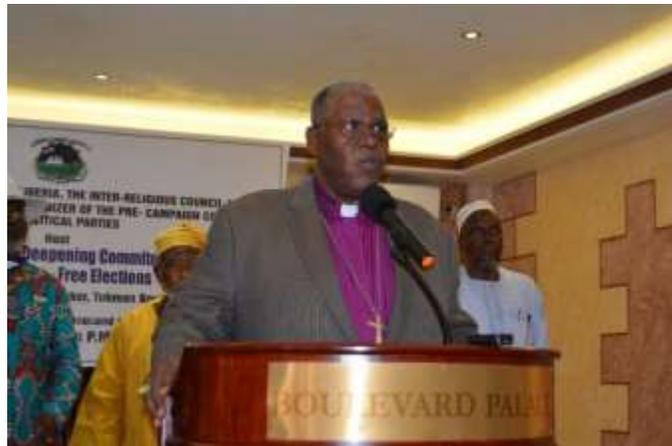
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GC and Partners hold Pre-Campaign Cocktail for Political Party Leaders

A pre-campaign Cocktail event for political party leaders on deepening commitment to peaceful and violence – free elections in Liberia took place on July 27, 2017 at the Boulevard Palace Hotel in Sinkor. The program brought together standard bearer, vice standard bearer, chairman, and women wing leader of political parties, and representatives from civil society organizations.

Episcopal Bishop, the Most Reverend Dr. Jonathan Hart commended political party leaders for their cooperation to efforts by the Inter-religious Council and partners over the past few months to discuss the need for the holding of peaceful elections in Liberia come October 2017.



The Cocktail was organized and sponsored by the Governance Commission, The Inter-Religious Council – IRCL, and the United Nations Mission in Liberia – UNMIL. These three were allowed to make remarks at the event.

Bishop Hart noted that the Interactive evening was necessary to allow the various political leaders to dialogue before setting out for campaigning. He reminded political actors of their commitment to assuring peaceful campaigning and elections as enshrined in the Farmington River Declaration they signed on June 4, 2017.

Bishop Hart disclosed plans to have the four new political parties and two others that did not sign onto to Farmington River Declaration on June 4, 2017 (and wanting to commit to peaceful elections) to provide them the opportunity to do so soon.

For his part, Governance Commission Board of Commissioners Chairman Dr. Amos Sawyer said the Governance Commission was happy that the Inter-Religious Council has taken up this major responsibility to provide leadership for mediation when the need arises during this electoral process. Dr. Sawyer also thanked the Chair, vice Chair and all members of the IRGL for their willingness to serve the Liberian people.



Dr. Sawyer thanked UNMIL, UNDP, ECOWAS, the international community and bilateral partners for their numerous contributions and support toward efforts aimed at ensuring the holding of free, fair credible democratic violence – free elections and electoral process in Liberia.

Dr. Sawyer also thanked political party leaders for providing the leadership to ensuring a violence- free electoral process and elections. This is the first national elections after the withdrawal of UNMIL troops from Liberia.

Also making remarks at the Cocktail was Ambassador Farid Zarif, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General in Liberia. Amb. Zarif also commended political parties and the media for the manner in which they have conducted themselves so far. He urged Liberia to emulate the examples of other West African countries that had held peaceful elections in recent times. He urged political leaders to remain committed to serve as beacons of hope to win the trust of the Liberian as we go to the poles in October 2017.



GC Holds Stakeholders' Forum on AGR Recommendations

The Governance Commission held a one day Stakeholders' Forum on the "methodology for political parties' debates" as prescribed by the Commission's latest Annual Governance Report (AGR) on Liberia's Electoral System released in June 2017.

The meeting took place at the Commission's 9th street office on July 14, 2017 with executives from various universities, media and civil society organizations in attendance, actively participated in discussions around the debates methodology for effective implementation.

The purpose of this meeting was to acquaint the attendees of their roles in the implementation strategy of the AGR recommendations for the holding of peaceful historic elections in Liberia this October. The 2017 elections is historic because, this will be the first, since 1944, that the incumbent president will not participate in the presidential contest; UNMIL's withdrawal, and transitioning from one living elected president to another come Inauguration Day January 18, 2018.

Commissioner Othello Gongar noted that it is anticipated that civil society including the media and academicians should spearhead the political debates as they are non-partisans and can easily win the trust of candidates. He said these



Dr. Othello Gongar making Opening remarks at the program

debates can also help promote citizenship.

The AGR has three major goals including strengthening the electoral system to ensure the successful holding of peaceful and credible elections; stimulate and deepen the public interests and discourse on elections; and

identify issues for post-elections 2017 electoral reform.

The meeting also discussed challenges of Liberia's electoral environment and pressure they pose on objective voting. Some of these challenges include high unemployment, Inflationary pressures, a state of persistent poverty, high illiteracy

rate, poor state of educational system and road infrastructure among others. These are also noted in the AGR.

Those in attendance of the Stakeholders meeting included representatives from institutions of higher learning including Stella Maris, Kofi Annan Institute for Peace-Building, African Methodist Episcopal University, United Methodist University,



Cuttington University, Tubman University, Ibrahim B. Babangida Graduate School of International Studies, and media institutions - Renaissance Communications Inc., Liberia Media for Democratic Initiatives as well as International partner – National Democratic Institute.

Meanwhile a committee has been set up to draw up plans for the implementation of the various recommendations of the AGR (with emphasis on the way forward, establishing a term of reference, budget and framework for its (Committee and partners) operations).