

## **CSO LEADERS STATEMENT ON DOMESTIC ELECTION OBSERVATION OF THE 2021 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN UGANDA**

*For Immediate release, 29 October 2020*

Civil Society has taken note of today's statement made by the National Bureau for NGOs at the Uganda Media Center in respect to the legality of the National Election Watch – Uganda (NEW-U).

We the undersigned CSOs wish to confirm that on Thursday 22 October 2020, the leadership of the Uganda National NGO Forum (UNNGOF) our platform and umbrella organization for NGOs in Uganda met with the National Bureau for NGOs on matters pertaining to the legality of the National Election Watch – Uganda (NEW-U). NEW-U was established as a loose CSO domestic election observation coalition desirous of engaging in Uganda's electoral process. It was established as a citizen centered vehicle for civic engagement that focuses on developing viable solutions to the existing challenges to Uganda's electoral democracy.

From the meeting with the NGO Bureau, it was proposed that the UNNGOF ceases to provide secretariat support to the NEW-U due to the Bureau's own view that NEW-U is a coalition which should be legally registered.

Whereas we understand the Bureau's concerns on the legality of the NEW-U, we wish to clarify on the following:

1. Legality of NEW-U;
2. The importance of domestic election observation in Uganda;
3. The future of CSO domestic election observation of the 2021 general elections in Uganda.

On the issue of the legality of NEW-U, it is imperative to underscore that the NGO Act 2016, does not specifically provide for registration of coalitions. Previous experience shows that CSOs have formed coalitions to observe elections in Uganda without a requirement for registration. Among prominent recent examples is: National Organization for Civic Education and Monitoring (NOCEM) – 2000; Non-Governmental Organizations Election Monitoring Group - Uganda (NEMGroup-U) – 2001; Democracy Monitoring Group (DEM Group) – 2006; and Citizens' Elections Observation Network – Uganda (CEON-U) – 2016.

It is therefore surprising that the Bureau is casting doubt on the legality of the NEW-U at this point – when the country is only two months' shy of the 2021 general election.

On the issue of election observation, S. 16 (1) of the Electoral Commission Act, Cap 140 states that: *“The Commission may at any election accredit any individual, group or institution to act as an election observer.”* Some of the organizations that formed NEW-U have been duly accredited by the Electoral Commission to observe the 2021 general elections in Uganda while others are still in the process of securing their accreditation. Election observation is an important aspect of an election because it provides a valuable tool for improving elections<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the United Nations and in the experience of domestic election observers in Uganda from previous election observation missions, observers help build public confidence in the honesty of the electoral processes. Observation can help promote and protect the civil and political rights of participants in elections. It can lead to the correction of errors or weak practices, even while an election process is still underway. It can deter manipulation and fraud, or expose such problems if they do occur. Following elections, reports and recommendations by observer groups can lead to changes and improvements in national law and practice.

Given the complex and broad nature of elections, domestic observation consortiums are established for the electoral period to leverage both experience and expertise of member organizations.

As for the future of domestic election observation for the 2021 elections in light of these developments, the duly registered NGOs and those accredited by the Electoral Commission will continue to observe the 2021 elections in Uganda. They will also continue to collaborate and coordinate to tap on the expertise of each organization in order to meaningfully contribute to the enhancement of the electoral process and the democratization processes in Uganda.

### **For God and My Country**

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### **LIST OF MEMBERS**

1. Uganda Women's Network
2. Africa Centre for Media Excellence
3. Alliance for Campaign Finance Monitoring
4. Uganda Joint Christian Council
5. National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders
6. Uganda Youth Network
7. Centre for Constitutional Governance
8. National Union of Disabled Persons of Uganda
9. Uganda National NGO Forum
10. Citizen Watch - IT
11. ActionAid – Uganda
12. Innovations for Democratic Engagement and Action
13. Kabarole Research and Resource Centre
14. Public Affairs Centre Uganda
15. Community Development and Child Welfare Initiative
16. Arua District NGO Network
17. Western Ankole Civil Society Forum
18. Gulu NGO Forum
19. Open Space Center
20. Bugisu NGO Forum
21. Pallisa Civil Society Network
22. First African Bicycle Initiative Orgnaization
23. Mid-Western Region Anti-Corruption Coalition
24. Agency for Development of Young Farmers in Uganda
25. Kick Corruption out of Uganda
26. Lira NGO Forum
27. Rwenzori Consortium for Civic Competence
28. Women's Democracy Network Uganda
29. Forum for Women in Democracy
30. Action for Development
31. Riamiriam Civil Society Network Karamoja
32. Centre for Basic Research
33. Wizarts Foundation
34. Femme Forte Uganda
35. Transparency International Uganda
36. Uganda Project Implementation and management Centre
37. Kabarole NGOs/ CBOs Association
38. Midwestern Regional Centre for Democracy and Human Rights
39. Public Policy Institute
40. Uganda Media Women's Association
41. Human Rights Centre Uganda
42. Anti-Corruption Coalition Uganda
43. Rwenzori Anti-Corruption Coalition
44. Mayank Anti-Corruption Coalition
45. African Youth Development Link
46. Kapchorwa Civil Society Organizations Alliance
47. Community Transformation Foundation Network