

Annex 2

Arrival Statement by Mr Olara Otunnu

I am pleased to confirm that the full complement of the Commonwealth Observer Group, (COG) has now arrived in Sierra Leone and has formally begun its mission.

The Commonwealth Observer Group is here in response to the invitation of the National Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone to observe the National and Local Council Elections scheduled for 17 November 2012.

On receipt of the invitation, the Secretary-General dispatched an Assessment Mission in September 2012 to consult with the political parties, officials of the National Electoral Commission as well as civil society, to assess the political environment and determine whether there was broad consensus for our presence in the country. Having been satisfied that all conditions were met, the Secretary-General constituted and dispatched this mission to Sierra Leone.

The Commonwealth has a long standing engagement with Sierra Leone dating back from 1999. The Secretariat established a Task Force on Sierra Leone to ensure a comprehensive and focused package of assistance to the country in the immediate post-war environment. The Secretariat was part of negotiations for the Lomé Peace Agreement, to which the Commonwealth was a moral guarantor.

The Commonwealth observed the 1996 and 2002 General Elections, the 2004 Local Government Elections and the 2007 Presidential and Parliamentary elections. The Commonwealth also deployed an Expert Team to Sierra Leone to observe the July 2008 Local Government Elections.

Ongoing Commonwealth support to Sierra Leone includes capacity-building to strengthen the police force, judiciary, diplomatic corps and youth sectors. Assistance is currently being provided in improving debt management and recording, establishment of the Stock Exchange, maritime boundary delimitation, trade capacity building and customs modernisation.

Additionally, the Commonwealth Secretariat seconded a staff member to the office of the President as Chief of Staff. His role encompasses the monitoring and implementation of the Agenda for Change – encompassing development priorities identified by the Sierra Leonean government.

Sierra Leone is amongst the largest recipients of technical assistance from the

Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC).

The Commonwealth Observer Group will carry out its duties in accordance with the standards expressed in the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observers and its accompanying Code of Conduct for International Election Observers. We will be impartial, objective, professional and respectful throughout this exercise.

The team intends to observe and evaluate the pre-election process, the election process itself and the post-election process. Apart from meeting with officials managing the elections and representatives of political parties, we will also be holding discussions with the NGO community, civil society groups, the media, youth and other relevant groups.

We will deploy to various parts of the country on 15 November. We intend to establish links and co-operative arrangements with other observer groups, especially during the period of observation.

We will return to Freetown after the elections and issue an interim statement commenting on the process of the election based on the reports of our observers. We will then draft a full report, which we will submit to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, who will forward it to the Government of Sierra Leone, the Chairperson of the National Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone, the leadership of the political parties and thereafter to all Commonwealth Governments.

While each of us has been selected to participate in this mission on the basis of experience and professional expertise, we do not represent the countries from which we have come or any of the professional or national organisations to which we belong. We are here solely as citizens of the Commonwealth.

In our final report, we may propose to the appropriate authorities, recommendations for change on institutional, procedural and other matters as would assist the holding of future elections.

We look forward through this mission to making a useful contribution to the strengthening of democracy in Sierra Leone.

Freetown, 14 November 2012