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LETTER DATED 24 JULY 1997 FROM THE SECRETARY-GENERAL  
ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

Following the official announcement of the results of the recently concluded elections in Liberia, I am pleased to inform you of the successful completion of the electoral process, which constituted the final element of the revised schedule of implementation of the Abuja Agreement. In support of the efforts of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) played an effective and critical role in bringing about this outcome.

In February 1997, consistent with the United Nations recommendations on a framework for the holding of elections in Liberia, ECOWAS and the Liberian parties established an agreed framework for the conduct of elections. On 2 April 1997, an Independent Elections Commission (IECOM) was established in Liberia, with the support of ECOWAS, for the purpose of organizing and conducting elections in Liberia. A Special Elections Law was drafted by IECOM providing for the preparation and conduct of the elections in conformity with international standards for democratic elections. The law was endorsed by the Extraordinary Summit of the ECOWAS leaders held at Abuja on 21 May 1997, following consultations with the Liberian political parties.

Logistical constraints experienced throughout the country during the registration process were overcome with the coordinated support of all the international actors, particularly the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), UNOMIL, the European Union and the United States of America. In the end, IECOM succeeded in registering over 750,000 voters, including many returning refugees. This impressive achievement far exceeded expectations and clearly demonstrated the enthusiasm of the Liberian people for the electoral process. The large number of registration sites and their wide distribution throughout the country afforded Liberians a fair and adequate opportunity to register themselves for the elections.

The political parties contesting the elections conducted a vigorous campaign. The campaign extended across the country, and was conducted in a generally civil and peaceful atmosphere. With ECOMOG providing security, political parties were free to travel and open offices in all parts of the country, and thereby take their messages to the people.

In order to observe and verify the polling exercise, over 500 international electoral observers, including a total of 317 medium- and short-term observers from UNOMIL, were deployed throughout all 13 counties of the country. The UNOMIL observers visited over 1,500 of the 1,864 polling stations. Throughout the country, they reported that polling was conducted in an organized and efficient manner and without reports of violence or intimidation. Voter turnout was high, and voters everywhere conducted themselves in an orderly and peaceful manner. No serious incidents were reported on polling day, and while a number of technical irregularities were noted, there were no reports of major irregularities or of any circumstance that could have affected the outcome or credibility of the polling process. Many observers noted the relatively large number of people asking for assistance in casting their ballots, owing to the very high rate of illiteracy throughout the country. In assessing the overall conduct of the polling, it was apparent that all eligible Liberians had a fair opportunity to vote for a political party of their choice.

Counting took place at polling sites immediately after the close of voting. In all cases, party agents and national and international observers had an opportunity to be present at the unsealing of the transparent ballot boxes and the counting and tallying of votes at the polling sites by the presiding officers. ECOMOG was also present at every polling station, including during the counting and tallying of votes. Final results from each polling site were announced by the presiding officer in the presence of party agents, national and international observers, and ECOMOG. Tally sheets were verified by the party agents present, who were also entitled to receive copies of the tally sheet.

The tabulation of results was conducted by IECOM in Monrovia, in the presence of party agents, national and international observers, and ECOMOG. Partial results were released by IECOM, beginning on 20 July, as they became available. Tabulation of the results was completed on 24 July, and final official results were announced by IECOM at that time. The official results showed that Mr. Charles Ghankey Taylor of the National Patriotic Party had received an absolute majority of votes cast, thereby making unnecessary the holding of a second round of balloting.

Earlier today, I issued a joint statement (see annex) with the Chairman of ECOWAS, General Sani Abacha, Head of State of Nigeria, verifying that the elections had been held in a secure environment, that the process had been credible and transparent and that the announced results were in accordance with the votes cast. On behalf of the United Nations and ECOWAS, the elections were certified as having been free and fair.

I commend IECOM for its effective management of the elections and ECOMOG for ensuring a secure environment for the electoral process. I also commend the international donor community for its effective and generous assistance to the electoral process. I commend and congratulate ECOWAS countries for their persistence and determination in seeing the peace process through to a successful conclusion, and for their efforts at making this unprecedented, joint operation between the United Nations and ECOWAS under Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, a success. It is an example of the type of cooperation that can help to give new impetus to international efforts to promote peace and stability, in Africa and throughout the world.

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Above all, however, I congratulate the people of Liberia for the serious and responsible manner in which they have demonstrated their commitment to democracy and their support for the peace process. I look forward to early discussions with the new Government on how the United Nations can best assist Liberia's efforts at national reconciliation, reconstruction, and development.

(Signed) Kofi A. ANNAN

Annex

Joint certification statement by the Chairman of the Economic  
Community of West African States and the Secretary-General on  
the 1997 Liberian Special Elections

1. The results of the Liberian elections held on 19 July 1997 have now been announced by the Chairman of the Independent Elections Commission (IECOM). With this act, IECOM has formally completed the electoral process, the last item on the revised schedule of implementation of the Abuja Agreement under the ECOWAS Peace Plan for Liberia. We have received the reports of our representatives in Monrovia that indicated that IECOM had succeeded in according Liberian voters the opportunity freely to elect their leaders. This was done within the framework of the Special Elections Law, a one-time only legal instrument, which conformed to international standards for democratic elections. The Law was endorsed by the Extraordinary Summit of ECOWAS leaders held at Abuja on 21 May 1997.
2. We were informed that more than 750,000 voters were registered nationwide to participate in the special elections and they turned out in large numbers to avail themselves of the opportunity to express freely their will through the ballot. Polling took place without violence or intimidation. The entire electoral process was conducted in an impartial and transparent manner. There were no reports of irregularities or incidents of a nature that could have affected the credibility of the elections, which were verified by over 500 international observers. The outcome of the presidential and legislative elections therefore reflects the will of the Liberian voters.
3. On behalf of the Economic Community of West African States and the United Nations we declare that the electoral process, which culminated in the final announcement of the results on 24 July 1997, was free, fair and credible.
4. We congratulate the Liberian people for demonstrating, through this process, their commitment to peace and their desire for the establishment of a democratically elected government. As the newly elected Government embarks on the daunting task of reconstructing the country and reconciling the nation, we call upon all Liberians to give it their fullest support. We commend the Organization of African Unity and the international donor community, which provided generous contributions and technical assistance towards the process that facilitated conducive arrangements for the elections. ECOWAS and the United Nations intend to continue to be actively engaged in the reconstruction of Liberia and to assist in mobilizing international support for this purpose.

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