

FREETOWN, Sierra Leone, September 14 (Infosplusgabon) - In a latest twist in the fortunes of the main opposition Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP), another candidate has withdrawn his candidacy to lead the party in the 2018 elections.

Andrew Keilie, an engineer turned politician, was a front runner in leading the opposition SLPP to next year's polls but he said he is quitting at a press conference on Wednesday.

He told that he was dropping out of the race because the SLPP executive has so far failed to create the a level playfield and tolerance needed for all candidates.

"Violence and intimidation, abusiveness, tribalism and regionalism, illegitimate in elections and intolerance have become the hall mark of the party, putting it in a bad light with a disappointed public," Keilie said.

Last week, former Vice President of Sierra Leone, Dr Joe Demby, citing a similar reason, quit from the party.

There is a wide spread belief among some members within the SLPP that the executive has tilted the scale in favour of former Presidential aspirant, Brig.-Gen. Julius Maada Bio. Bio's camp has always denied the allegations.

SLPP are yet to comment on Keilie's latest decision.

This announcement comes just 24 hours after another potential aspirant, John Benjamin, took the party to the Political Party Registration Commission (PPRC) requesting a halt in the process of electing an official Presidential candidate, until the executive conducts an election to replace itself. PPRC has since ruled in favour of Benjamin.

Keilie has not revealed his future plans in politics, especially within the SLPP. However, there is strong possibility that he may join forces with former United Nations under-secretary of state, Dr Kandeh Yumkella.

In a radio interview this morning, he fueled this suggestion by saying he is leaving his options open at the moment. Keilie and Yuimkella were part of a faction in the SLPP known as All Aspirant Alliance.

Last week, Dr. Yumkella resigned from the party and joined the newly-formed National Grand Coalition.

SLPP is scheduled to conduct a delegates' conference this weekend, where they would elect a new executive. The previous executive have outlived their term by two years because of some serious internal wrangling.

Since the 2012 general elections, the SLPP has been locked in some serious internal dispute. It has since led to a mass exodus from the party. Political pundits have warned that they could lose the election very easily in 2018 with such disunity.

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