

**INTERIM STATEMENT BY NIGERIA CIVIL SOCIETY SITUATION ROOM ON THE RE-RUN ELECTIONS IN RIVERS STATE HELD ON SATURDAY, 10<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2016**

**Issued: 1:00pm-Sunday, 11<sup>th</sup> December 2016**

The Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room observed the suspended elections in Rivers State held on December 10<sup>th</sup> 2016. Field observers were deployed to 5 of the LGAs with the largest proportion of elections being redone.

With regards to the election atmosphere, the Situation Room issued a pre-election statement on the toxic conditions created by political parties before the poll. Reports of our observation of the Rivers State re-run election are as follows:

**Polling Conduct**

The elections started late in all of the areas observed with the earliest reported starting times being 1030am, with other locations reporting a start significantly later (Gbe, Gokana 140pm). Delays were so severe in parts of Khana and Eleme we were unable to confirm if voting started at all. Interviews with voters in Khana Ward 3 (Lleuku/Nyokoro) reported that materials and staff never arrived in Lleuku and Nyokoro.

The delays and lack of public information on the situation added to an already tense and difficult situation, in some cases leading to the abandonment of the poll (as in Gbe, Gokana). Although disputes with political parties during the early stages distribution were an obvious factor Rivers State voters deserve a better explanation as to why their state again ran 24 hours behind all other states on the start of materials distribution and why remedial measures were inadequate.

Voting was noted as relatively calm and security appeared to be reasonably well deployed and managing local scenes well until around 1pm.

In at least two locations there was obvious interference in proper polling (Etche Ward 13 Unit 16 ballot box stuffing, Gokana - B Dere Community Primary School party agent handling voters ballots). There was no attempt by election officials or security personnel to truncate this activity.

**Disruption of Voting / Collation**

In two wards in Gokana Local Government (B Dere CP School Ward 4 & Bomu Ward 7 Units 1-8) Situation Room observers were watching the close of voting and early counting at school and church locations with a cluster of units which was proceeding without any significant problem.

In both cases a team of police and military personnel arrived and removed all of the election materials and officials from the location. In Bomu, presiding officers at 3pm were waiting to count and telling voters they were waiting for their supervisor. The situation was calm. A combined team of police and army personnel arrived in hiluxes with an armored personnel carrier, chased voters away, and carried away materials and ad hoc staff. In B Dere, the security team was accompanied by a party agent for one of the major parties and departed with party supporters from the location.

Situation Room observers interviewed voters from Bodo (St Pius School Ward who reported that materials were taken away by a combined team of personnel after a contrived security incident which started with Police SARS personnel shooting in the air in the vicinity of the polling units). Interviews and media reports have named Mbeari John Meebari being shot and killed in this incident.

There are serious allegations by observers, the public, and party representatives of the same incidents happening systematically in at least Etche, Andoni, and Eleme local governments in addition to Gokana.

### **Credibility of the Poll**

The credibility of an election hinges on a fair process in the build up to the poll, a conducive environment, and a transparent counting of votes.

The violent disruption of voting and collation in the areas observed means that these polls will not be accepted locally as credible, and conduct observed has called into question the neutrality of security forces and of election officials.

INEC has issued an interim statement effectively labelling the poll a success. If this statement pre-dates the breakdown seen on the afternoon of Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> this needs correcting. A failure to acknowledge the serious issues in the poll and the impact on collation would call INEC's own credibility into question.

### **Restoring Transparency**

Lastly, we call on INEC to take the following actions:

- All incident reports and accounts of its officials should be made available without favour to Election tribunals, political parties making submissions and election observers
- A breakdown of results for all areas in the state (to unit level) for both the March and December polls should be made available to political parties, observers, and the media.
- An investigation that includes independent actors should be initiated into the security incidents affecting the December 10<sup>th</sup> polls, specifically looking at why so many areas had officials and materials removed before collation took place at polling units.

**The Situation Room is made up of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) working in support of credible and transparent elections in Nigeria and includes such groups as Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC), CLEEN Foundation, Action Aid Nigeria, Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), Proactive Gender Initiative (PGI) Enough is Enough Nigeria, WANGONET, Partners for Electoral Reform, JDPC and Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth & Advancement (YIAGA). Others are Development Dynamics, Centre for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) Stakeholders Democracy Network, Human Rights Monitor, Election Monitor, Reclaim Naija, Institute for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, CITAD, Alliance for Credible Elections (ACE), Nigeria Women Trust Fund, CISLAC, and several other CSOs numbering more than seventy.**

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#### **Contact information:**

**Website:** [situationroom.placng.org](http://situationroom.placng.org)

**Email:** [situationroom@placng.org](mailto:situationroom@placng.org)

**Twitter:** @situationroomng

#NigeriaSituationRoom

**Facebook:** Facebook.com/situationroomnigeria

**Hotlines:** 09095050505,09032999919