

Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room
Statement on the Stakeholders Forum on Elections
Monday, December 19th 2016 at the Transcorp Hilton Hotel, Abuja
(Lagos Hall)

Introduction

The Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room met to review elections in Nigeria since 2015 and the reform processes since 2016 warning that indications point to a worrying State of affairs administration threatening Nigeria's democracy. These warned of an emerging of normalizing the blatant abuse of security services by political parties. In turn this is escalating the behavior of all parties who are taking a 'by any means necessary attitude' to countering the advantage of those blatantly dousing their power.

"The most recent poll in Rivers State highlights the dangers we face if we are to remain a democracy by 2019. Politicians in Rivers and their national sponsors intimidated, bribed and assaulted election officials and introduced the use of the police, army and other services in the direct subversion of polls."

"Elections in Nigeria cannot survive if political parties power cannot lead by example and ensure that respect of the most basic of rules and instead create an atmosphere that is so toxic, voters fear for their safety when going out to vote. Those in government have a particular responsibility to foster an environment that is secure and fair for all sides. The present administration is failing in this responsibility."

"We are calling on President Buhari and his administration to renew their commitment to democracy by taking concrete steps to reverse abuses seen over the past 12 months and fully support critical reforms to the electoral system. The National Assembly must support and deliver on the reforms that have been set in motion over the past year. Political parties must also begin the changes internally that focus their attention on gathering and legitimately winning the support of the Nigerian public

We call on the international community to use all available levers to support the demands from the Nigerian people for politicians to respect the rule of law and reverse their destabilization of the institutions that are meant to secure free elections and accountable representation.

We have identified the following that must take place over the coming 12 months:

- Rigorous steps to protect electoral and security institutions from abuse by political actors before, during and after elections
- Reform of political parties that demonstrates their internal commitment to democratic function, credible policies, and accountable governance
- Electoral reform that radically improves the transparency of election results and protects voting from the systematic abuse that persists in many states
- Reform of election tribunals so that timely natural justice and accountability is put at the centre of their every activity
- Immediate and effective prosecution of mastermind of Rivers State electoral fraud to ensure a clear message is sent across the country that this kind of rascality can no longer be tolerated.

These reforms are critical to address the emergence of abuses that we have seen in the past 12 months that include:

- Political violence and bribery by all sides and the co-option of the security services seen during the Bayelsa Governorship Election
- Seeming co-option of the security services to delay the Governorship poll in Edo state to the advantage of the ruling party in the state
- Political violence, manipulation of results, intimidation of voters and officials and the abuse of security forces seen during both the March and December re-run polls in Rivers State

Situation Room draws attention to the fact that under previous election cycles in Nigeria attempts to reform the groundrules of polls have been cynically delayed or watered down to the point where they have little meaningful effect or even undermine democracy. Such moves, if repeated, would lead to a collapse in democracy in Nigeria that would set us back decades.

We underline that opportunities exist to make change via renewed legislative reform but reforms made via these route must be given the fullest possible strength and fully enacted within 2017 if they are to have any chance of giving a solid foundation to future elections.

We renew our calls from last week to address the multiple abuses that arose from the Rivers elections in which the two major political parties in the country must now acknowledge abuse of our electoral system threatens to spiral out of control.

INEC must also take stock of all aspects the Rivers election where it is now clear that protective measures were completely overwhelmed by abuses on December 10th that have undermined almost all credibility of the poll. Specifically we call for:

- Investigation into violence, intimidation and bribery in relation to control of results from the Rivers polls noting that serious and credible allegations have been made against both major political parties in the country.

- INEC should immediately release 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 along with reports of all incidents affecting the credibility of the poll.
- An investigation into the directly observed reports of security services interfering in polls and urgent remedial steps to prevent any future abuse by political office holders.
- An investigation of the circumstance leading to the killing of Police DSP Alkali and bringing to account all persons responsible for his killing and for all other deaths that occurred during December 10, 2016 legislative re-rerun elections in Rivers State.

The Situation Room has compiled notes on its election observation in Rivers State in March and December as well as all its previous statements and can be found in http://www.placng.org/situation_room/sr/situation-room-statement/

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