

Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room

Statement on Rivers State Legislative Rerun Election in Etche LGA

Issued: Friday, 3rd March 2017

The Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room observed the latest Rivers State re-run election in Etche Local Government Area that was the concluding polls for a House of Representatives and State Assembly position on Saturday, 25th February 2017.

It was to the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) credit that the poll was concluded in difficult conditions but once again a Rivers State poll was seriously marred by violence despite extraordinary levels of security.

We are deeply concerned that despite reports of the Police deploying 3,500 personnel to a single LGA election alongside significant military forces violence and manipulation was bad enough for 25 INEC staff to be hospitalized and for 44 of 147 polling units to be cancelled.

We unreservedly condemn the violence that was driven by the two major political parties in the poll.

We also condemn the pressure placed on the two constituency collation officers by the Rivers State Governor in the early hours of Sunday, 26th February 2017, which cannot be allowed to set a precedent for political behavior in future.

Our observations were that in the areas we were able to observe when (polls were not interfered with they were generally well conducted, noting that turnouts of 10% reflect the many ongoing security and political problems in Rivers State.

We acknowledge the effort of INEC staff in the Etche LGA poll given that the poll justified concerns for their safety and wellbeing with reports of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) withdrawing their participation. We note that while circumstances were difficult there are still lessons for INEC from the Etche LGA poll, particularly around collation, communications, and security management.

We strongly recommended the arrest and prosecution of electoral offenders in this election. We call on the major political parties in Nigeria to recognize that their conduct and leadership is creating problems that threaten the prospects for viable elections in Nigeria.

We call on all stakeholders to support a review of conduct around elections that recognizes the failure of constantly escalating security responses in the face of politically driven turmoil and violence.

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