The Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (Situation Room) continued with its observation of the 2019 Nigeria General Elections and in this interim report, we are focusing on reports and incidents arising from the opening of polls to collation of results and issues around the 9th March 2018 conduct of the Governorship, State Legislative and FCT Area Council elections:

**Election Management by INEC**

The elections saw improved use of the Smart Card Reader. Reports received from our observers showed limited incidents of Smart Card Reader malfunction and where there were failures or glitches, efforts were made by INEC to rectify the problem.

There were also reports of significant logistics improvements in this election, especially as it relates to timely delivery of electoral materials and polling units having the complete set of election materials. Situation Room acknowledges the efforts of INEC at improving on the average starting time of opening polls. The start time for the elections was on the average at about 8:30am. However, there were also accounts of late commencement in few instances, for example in Badagry, Lagos State, Nembe LGA, Bayelsa State and some local governments in Rivers State. Of concern, were the reports received of non-payment of INEC officials and ad-hoc staff that resulted in multiple cases of protest by said officials in Anthony Village, Ejigbo, Ketu, Mile 2 and Ojodu Areas of Lagos State and Vom in Plateau State.

**Voter Apathy**

Our observations indicate a worrying level of voter apathy with this election. In an election that should resonate more with citizens, Situation Room notes that the turnout was very poor with polling officials sometimes sitting idly and waiting for voters to show up. While voter turnout is historically low for non-presidential elections, our findings indicate that the voter turnout was also affected by the disappointing conduct of the 23rd February 2019 presidential elections and the security concerns in different parts of the country.

**Militarisation of the Elections**

While appreciate the existing security challenges across the country, Situation Room is worried about reports of excessive military involvement in Nigeria’s elections, particularly in the South-South and South-East – Rivers, Akwa Ibom and Imo States. The militarisation of the country’s electoral process is a troubling one as this is not just about the presence of military officials, but the actions of our intelligence agencies, the use of the military by the political class and the partisanship and non-recourse to rules of engagement of our armed forces.
**Election Violence**

Situation Room states unequivocally that elections are for citizens to democratically exercise their right to choose their government and as such, no election should cost lives. Situation Room notes with profound sadness the election related violence that has led to the deaths of 58 Nigerians in this electoral cycle including Hon. Temitope Olatoye (aka Sugar) of Oyo State who was shot and Sunday Oroh in Enugu State yesterday. Situation Room notes that in Rivers, Plateau and Edo States there were reports of denial of access to polling units by political thugs. In Ahoada LGA of Rivers State and Shendam LGA of Plateau State, journalists were kidnapped and later released.

Situation Room is also concerned by the harassment and attacks on INEC officials. In Benue State, four polling officials and in Kogi State six polling officials were kidnapped. Reports received from Imo State was of the sequestration of 14 bus loads of Collation Officers by Governor Rochas Okorocha forcing INEC to engage in impromptu recruitment of Collation Officers. In Isoko North, Delta State, there were reports that Corps members were beaten by hoodlums and in Etche LGA in Rivers State. In addition, election materials were burnt in different places like Ezza North LGA, Ebonyi State and Gwer East LG in Benue State.

**Vote Buying**

There were reports received from across the country on the prevalence of vote buying. This was seen in Adamawa, Sokoto, Lagos, Delta, Enugu, Ekiti, Bauchi, Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau, Kwara, Zamfara, Kebbi, Oyo, Kano and Osun States and amounts given ranged from N500 to N5,000.

**Collation of Results**

Early reports show that the collation of election results remains a major weak point in Nigeria’s election management and administration. In Rivers State we have received numerous reports of security agencies interfering in the collation process, deliberate targeting of Election and Collation Officers making their way to the State Collation Centre. One example is in Adoni LGA where the EO was targeted and in Ebonyi, ward collation was abandoned. The Imo State Governor is also reported to have seized collation officials in Ideato South in an attempt to force announcement of favourable results. The exclusion of accredited election observers and party agents from accessing collation centres is reported in Delta, Akwa Ibom, Rivers and Zamfara States.

**Perennial Election Crisis in Rivers State**

Since 2011, elections in Rivers State have been a major theatre for violence and further escalated after the 2015 elections. From the 23rd February 2019 presidential election till date, 28 Nigerians have died. The fatal rivalry between the state leadership of PDP and APC has been the source of this violence and attack on the electoral process since 2015. Military and other security agencies have been used to undermine the electoral process with harassment and abuse of INEC officials and wanton destruction of lives and properties. Election observers are harassed and the environment for elections feels like a war, disenfranchising citizens who
want to participate. This has gravely undermined governance and security in the state. The Situation Room notes that the principal actors in this macabre dance of shame are well known but have operated in an environment of absolute impunity for years. The Situation Room calls on government to urgently address this issue. We call on citizens of Rivers and indeed Nigerians to lend their voice in condemning these trends and demanding for accountability.

Conclusion

In the light of the serious shortcomings with the elections, Situation Room calls for an independent Inquiry into the conduct of the 2019 Nigeria General Elections. This independent inquiry should address amongst others issues; procurement, logistics management, role of the military and abuse of process by INEC officials. This is urgently needed to identify challenges and recommendations towards repairing the damaged credibility of Nigeria’s electoral process.

Situation Room calls on INEC to take the lead in pushing for reforms in the electoral process. Of immediate importance is the need for INEC to call out publicly institutions, individuals and events that may have undermined its ability to carry out its mandate. It is also important that INEC is honest in admitting its own failurures. This is needed urgency in restoring faith in the election process.

There must be individual accountability for violence and manipulating of the election process. This is a collective duty for all law enforcement agencies in Nigeria. We cannot as country afford to permit this level of impunity and disruption of the election process. INEC should lead on this and transparently inform Nigerians where it encounters challenges.

The number of fatalities around these elections is unacceptable. Voters, INEC officials and security agencies have lost their lives. We call for reasonably packaged compensation to families who have lost lives in these elections. INEC officials and security agents who have suffered physical and psychological injuries must be supported and rehabilitated.

Situation Room had earlier published the Threshold Document for the 2019 Nigeria Elections for the measurement of the credibility of the elections. Of the 8 criteria, 5 of them show significant non-compliance. A thorough review of these criteria will form the basis of our final report.

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SIGNED:
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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 YIAGA Africa. Others are Development Dynamics, Centre for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD), Partners West Africa Nigeria (PWAN), Stakeholders Democracy Network, Human Rights Monitor, Reclaim Naija, CITAD, Nigerian Women Trust Fund, Alliance for Credible Elections (ACE), CISLAC, and several other CSOs numbering more than seventy.

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