

**SECOND INTERIM STATEMENT BY THE NIGERIA CIVIL SOCIETY SITUATION ROOM ON ITS OBSERVATION OF THE KOGI AND BAYELSA STATE GOVERNORSHIP ELECTIONS**

*Issued: 3:00pm, Sunday, 17 November 2019*

The Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (Situation Room) is issuing this statement following its observation of the Kogi and Bayelsa States Governorship Elections held on 16 November 2019.

**General**

The levels of violence witnessed in the two State governorship elections are unprecedented, alarming and raises questions about the credibility of the elections. Nigerians had expected that lessons learnt from the 2019 General elections by stakeholders especially by political parties, the Police and other security services would be taken to improve on the conduct of these elections. Unfortunately, this was not the case and both elections have proved to be a disappointment. The governorship elections conducted in Kogi and Bayelsa States represent a major setback for Nigeria's electoral democracy.

**Commencement of Polls**

Situation Room received reports of late commencement of polls in several polling units across the two States of Kogi and Bayelsa. Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) raised concern that the security services attached to support the elections did not provide back up to enable some of its staff start out at the stipulated time and this caused several of the delays. It is noteworthy though that in several of the cases where polls commenced late, INEC Guidelines provided for polling to continue until everyone on queue voted.

**Logistics**

There are also few reports of polling materials and personnel not arriving on time. INEC again put the responsibility for these failings on the security services who did not report on time or failed to provide security for transportation of election materials to their destinations.

## **Use of Smart Card Readers**

The elections saw improved use of the Smart Card Readers. Situation Room observed that Smart Card Readers were widely deployed and utilised in both States. There were however isolated cases of Card Reader malfunctions. In most of the instances, these were rectified in line with INEC guidelines. In other cases, there was a resort to manual accreditation. In Bayelsa, this was observed in Southern Ijaw, Ward 4, PU 12; Ogbia Local Government, Ward 9, PU 8 and Otakeme Ward, PU 1. Also in Kogi State, this was seen in Idah Local government, Ede Ward, PU 002.

## **Voter Turnout**

Situation Room's impression on Voter turnout in the two governorship elections is that of enthusiasm. Voters were not deterred by pre-election day anxiety, threats of violence and turned out in their numbers. Election day turnout was however marred by violence and activities of political parties and security agents leading to disruption of polls in several areas. The violence made it difficult for voters to observe the usual practice of staying back after voting to observe counting and collation. This is worsened by reports of voters and observers being chased out from the vicinity, and political parties colluding with election officials and dealing with the ballots as they pleased.

## **Security**

Situation Room received many reports of security surrounding the elections including lapses that had far-reaching consequences on the elections. The Nigerian police had stated before the elections that it was deploying 35, 200 police personnel to Kogi State and 31, 041 police personnel to Bayelsa State.

In addition, other security agencies deployed personnel for the elections including the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, Nigeria Immigration Service, Nigeria Customs Service, Federal Road Safety Commission, Army, Navy and Air Force. The claimed overwhelming numbers of the deployments by security officials should ordinarily provide enough security for the elections. In spite of these, security gaps and lapses remained manifest throughout the elections in the two States. Security forces failed to provide details of names of its personnel that it deployed for the elections, raising questions about the claims on the numbers deployed.

Situation Room received reports of security personnel standing by and watching incidents of ballot box snatching, violence and abuse of the electoral process. For instance, in Kogi State this was observed in Ajaokuta Local Government, Ganaja Ward; Dekina Local Government, Anyigba Ward, PUs 003,005, 009, 018, 025 and 026 and Ankpa Local Government, Agodo Ward, PU 006. Whereas in Bayelsa State this was observed in Kolokuma/ Opokuma Local Government, Ward 1, PU 003 and Nembe Local Government,

Igbeta-Ewoama Ward, PU 002. In several polling units, police personnel who were unarmed were overwhelmed by political parties, thugs and supporters. These security personnel, as was the case in most instances, did not receive back up support from roving security personnel as planned. There were also reports of armed security personnel shooting, dispersing voters and carting away election materials and even destroying them.

### **Vote Trading**

The commercialisation of Nigeria's elections appears to have reached unprecedented heights. Political parties and their agents operated openly and with impunity distributing money in purchase of votes and it appeared that there were no efforts to stop them. Sums paid at polling units ranged from ₦500 to ₦6,000.

### **Report on Persons with Disabilities (PWDs)**

From various field reports, the following observations were made:

- There was low voter turnout of PWDs in both States.
- The issue of availability of electoral materials like Braille, magnifying glasses and tactiles hindered participation of PWDs. For instance, in Kogi State, Anyigba Local government, PU 001, 7 persons with albinism were told not to vote because of non-availability of magnifying glasses. This clearly indicates that electoral officers have less knowledge or awareness on INEC Guidelines for PWDs.
- Open exploitation of PWDs by politicians who cash-in on the level of poverty of PWDs to buy their votes.

### **Conclusion**

- Situation Room is disappointed with the conduct of the two governorship elections that held in Kogi and Bayelsa States and worries that the elections fall below the standards expected for a free, fair and credible elections.
- With particular reference to the elections in Kogi State, the levels of violence perpetrated by the two major political parties and politicians, evident sometimes in the collusion with security personnel, seriously undermined the elections, deterred voters and made the exercise a farce. Accordingly, Situation Room is calling for the cancellation of the entirety of the Kogi State elections conducted on 16 November 2019.
- The Kogi State election represents a major dent to Nigeria's democratic process.
- The governorship elections in Bayelsa State has also witnesses serious lapses, with high levels of violence perpetrated by political parties again in collusion with security

personnel and reports of "community voting"- a practice whereby political parties controlling particular areas compel overwhelming votes in favour of their party.

- Situation Room calls on INEC to fully interrogate the elections in Bayelsa State with a view to identifying the high incidences of malpractice that took place and reflect the genuine vote of the people.
- In the light of the security failures, violence, thuggery and general abuse witnessed in the elections, Situation Room calls for an urgent passage and implementation of an Electoral Offences Commission law to address all issues related to electoral abuse.

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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), Stakeholder 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.