

SITUATION ROOM'S STATEMENT ON STATE OF THE NATION AND UPCOMING GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION IN EDO STATE

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State of the Nation:

Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room hereby expresses concern over the deteriorating state of affairs in Nigeria. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed weaknesses of government at State and National level in the country and the inability of the Nigerian State to provide good governance to protect the right of citizens or manage the affairs of the country. Government's management of Covid-19 pandemic has left a lot to be desired. Covid-19 tests are abysmally low, support of citizens who are victims of the pandemic is near absent and the ravaging consequences of the pandemic has not been ameliorated by Government interventions. Indeed Government through its agencies has unfairly imposed all manners of levies and charges on out of job citizens and businesses.

In addition to Government failures in the economic sphere, is the heightened insecurity in the country. On a daily basis, communities, villages and towns are attacked by bandits, insurgents and terrorists with the Security Services unable to respond in any responsible manner. Multiple calls by State Governors, the National Legislature, CSOs and citizens for the sack of the ineffective leadership of the security agencies have been ignored by the President. This response is made more saddening by the facts that the leadership of almost all of the security agencies in the country remain in office well beyond their term limits. Human rights in the country remain under serious threat with free speech and free expression constantly threatened. Recent peaceful protests by the "Revolution Now" activists was highhandedly suppressed by security forces and several of the protesters arrested and detained. An announcement by Minister of Information, Lai Mohammed increased fines for hate speech violation from ₦500,000.00 (five hundred thousand naira) to ₦5,000,000.00 (five million naira) under NBC guidelines without Legislative enactments thus violating Constitutional principles and provisions. Government economic policies and pronouncements have failed to address the incredibly high level of job losses and unemployment leaving citizens to their fate and worsening desperation levels in the country.

Upcoming Edo State Governorship Election:

Situation Room is concerned about the rhetorics and isolated incidents of violence in Edo State ahead of the September 2020 Governorship election. Public statements by candidates and leaders of the two main political parties is heightening political tension in the State and stoking violence.

Issue based campaigns have been relegated to the background and citizens are not being offered any real electoral choices. Recent actions by political actors indicate threats to the

peaceful conduct of elections including squabbles over membership and leadership of the State House of Assembly. In addition to violence laden campaigns, Situation Room is worried that these campaigns are being conducted in total disregard of COVID-19 pandemic protection protocols of campaign and voting. Escalation of COVID-19 cases represent a threat to voter turnout and participation in the elections.

Situation Room welcomes INEC's trial of a portal where voters and the public at large can see their polling unit level results online within hours of voting closing. We have seen the poll at the weekend for the Nasarawa State Assembly where voters and observers were able to view polling results forms online the same evening that the elections held.

"This is a significant step forward for transparency in Nigerian elections that should be reinforced and applied rigorously in upcoming polls in Edo and Ondo States. This proves that it is possible for every voter to have better access to the record of what has happened in their polling unit."

Situation Room expects such transparency systems to come under pressure in more competitive elections. While we see this measure as vitally important it does not substitute for necessary Electoral Act reforms and improvement in political party conduct that are necessary for stabilizing elections in Nigeria.

The recent nullification of the Bayelsa State Governorship elections by the election tribunal also reinforces the need for urgent action on electoral reform, particularly on the role of the Judiciary in dispensing electoral justice and the need to quickly conclude election matters.

Situation Room calls for the following:

1. The Nigerian Government should genuinely seek to implement measures that restores citizens confidence in its ability to govern the nation.
2. The Nigerian Government should take measures to address economic challenges to citizens, huge loss of jobs, financial hardships, and the arbitrary and unnecessary financial burden being inflicted on citizens via increased new taxes, fees, licenses etc
3. Institutions of Government should always respect and protect the rights of Nigerians.
4. INEC should take every measure to ensure that its newly introduced election results portal is transparent, effective and efficient.
5. All political actors and security services in Edo State should act on calls to end disruptive actions and violence in the state.
6. Political parties in Edo State should also focus on issue based campaigns in this final lead to election day and to observe INEC's COVID-19 protocols in the conduct of campaign rallies.
7. INEC should resolve to ensure strict adherence to its guidelines for the conduct of elections and clearly map out punitive measures for election stakeholders who flout the Commission's COVID-19 guidelines.

8. Security agents should be non-partisan and professional before during and after the election, and to abide by INEC's Code of Conduct and Rules of Engagement for Security Personnel on Electoral Duty.

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, The Albino Foundation, Alliance for Credible Elections (ACE), CISLAC, and several other CSOs numbering more than seventy.