

**NIGERIA CIVIL SOCIETY SITUATION ROOM INTERIM STATEMENT ON
EDO STATE GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION 2020**

Issued: In Benin City at 2:00pm, Saturday, 19th September 2020

The Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (Situation Room) is continuing to closely observe the on-going Governorship election in Edo State holding today, Saturday, 19th September 2020 and at this time will like to state as follows:

Logistics and commencement of Poll: Reports from the field show that materials arrived relatively on time in several of the polling units across the State especially Edo North and Central Senatorial Districts, with polls commencing at about 9:00am in most of the Polling Units (PUs). Situation Room observers however reported delays in opening of polls in several other locations, especially in Benin City comprising of Oredo, Egor and Ikpoba Okha Local Government Areas. For example, in three PUs in Ivbiore Primary School, Ekae/Ugbo, GRA/Etete in Oredo LGA, polls did not open until 10:35am due to late arrival of poll officials. Similarly, polling did not commence until about 12:00 noon in polling unit 9, ward 9 Uhunmwonde LGA.

There were a few reports of the malfunctioning of the smart card readers and failure to authenticate fingerprints which seemed to slow down the process in some polling units.

Compliance with Covid-19: Situation Room observed a widespread failure to comply with and enforce INEC guidelines on Covid-19 in the State. For example, voters and election workers were observed staying in clusters as against queuing up at the 28 PUs in the dilapidated buildings of the Ministry of Education, New Benin, Oredo LGA. Additionally, citing 28 PUs in those dilapidated buildings is a recipe for disaster. There was also a total disregard for the use of facemasks.

Situation Room commends INEC officials for giving priority to Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) and other vulnerable groups especially the elderly, even though most of the PUs were not accessibility to some categories of PWDs.

Conduct of security officials: At this time, Situation Room notes that there is a reasonable presence of security officials at most of the polling units we observed in the State.

Situation Room is however concerned about reports of security personnel invading the hotel housing leaders of a major political and restricting their movement in and out of the hotel. There is also the report of security personnel restraining staff of the election observer group and partner of Situation Room – YIAGA from accessing their Data Centre. These action on the part of the security is hereby condemned as an unacceptable infringement of the rights of citizens and citizens groups to participate and contribute to the electoral process.

Similar incident of security overreach were reported in Nigeria’s election during the Kogi State Governorship Election in 2019, and seems to be an emerging pattern of electoral abuse and interference by security agencies to undermine the electoral process. This trend, if allowed to continue, can be dangerous to Nigeria’s democracy for which many people lost their lives fighting for.

Vote Buying: Situation Room is also receiving reports of widespread vote buying by politicians and agents of political parties across the State. Reports of vote buying has occurred in about 55% of the PUs observed so far. For instance, in Ward 4 of Emotan College and Ministry of Education in New Benin where there are 28 polling units both in Oredo LGA, voters are being induced with cash ranging up to ₦5,000.

Electoral violence and activities of non-state armed groups: Despite the large presence of security officials in the State, Situation Room observers reported movement of thugs and intimidation of voters by a certain group without constraint or hindrance in many polling units within the State capital, Benin City - comprising of Oredo, Egor and Ikpoba Okha Local Government Areas.

Conclusion: There is a need for all stakeholders to give their best in this election. Situation Room is calling on political parties and their representatives to exercise restraint and respect the Peace Accord their Party and Candidates signed on Tuesday, 15th September 2020.

The Police, being the lead security agency, would need to assure the electorate as well as the general public by the conduct of its personnel that it will stand on the part of the law. As the polls come to an end, and collation processes are about to commence, we call on both INEC and the Police to ensure that the process is transparent and credible, as well as to ensure that the election is not ruined with violence.

SIGNED:

Esther Uzoma

Alternate Chair

For: Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room

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), Centre for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD), Nigerian Women Trust Fund (NUTF), CITAD, Enough is Enough Nigeria, WANGONET, Partners for Electoral Reform, JDPC and Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth & Advancement (YIAGA). Others are Development Dynamics, Stakeholder Democracy Network, Human Rights Monitor, Reclaim Naija, Alliance for Credible Elections (ACE), CISLAC, The Conscience for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution (CHRCR), Young Innovators and Vocational Training Initiative, EdoCSOs, CONGOs Edo State, Brave Heart Initiative, Partners West Africa and several other CSOs numbering more than seventy.

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