

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT BY NIGERIA CIVIL SOCIETY SITUATION ROOM ON EDO STATE GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION SCHEDULED FOR SATURDAY, 19TH SEPTEMBER 2020

Issued: 1:00pm, Friday, 18th September 2020

The Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (Situation Room) has deployed 300 Observers for the Edo State Governorship election scheduled for Saturday, 19th September 2020. The Situation Room will be on ground in Edo State to receive reports from its partners and networks distributed across the 18 local government areas of the State.

Situation Room has received assurances from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the Nigeria Police Force that they are fully prepared for the elections, with INEC assuring that logistics and deployment are fully under its control and the Police assuring that it will keep the security situation under check.

1. INEC and Election Administration: Situation Room expects an improved administration and management of the 2020 Edo State Governorship Election and will be holding INEC accountable to its promise and assurances of preparedness, and will look out for the following, as INEC administers the elections:

- i. Early distribution and deployment of personnel
- ii. Timely opening of poll
- iii. Adherence to COVID-19 Protocols on Election day and INEC's Guidelines for conducting elections during the pandemic
- iv. Knowledge of procedures by personnel
- v. Voting procedures particularly the efficacy of the Smart Card Readers
- vi. Transparent Collation process

INEC has also expressed a commitment to proper management of the collation process for the election. Situation Room will be keeping a close eye on the collation process of this election with our observers deployed to all of the collation centres of the election.

Situation Room welcomes the continued use of the Smart Card Readers and the introduction of the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) Portal as an additional layer of

accountability and transparency in this election. The Commission has reiterated that this portal will not be utilised for e-collation or voter authentication but will only serve as a platform for the upload of polling units' results using the Z-Pads. Situation Room calls on INEC to ensure that this portal is available for this proposed use and to stand by its commitment to opening the portal to public view and not accepting results where violence or electoral malpractices occur. Situation Room commends INEC's addition of new security features on its sensitive materials as a means of reducing potential interference with ballot papers and result sheets.

2. Security Agencies: Situation Room will like to commend the Inter-Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES) on the development of a "Code of Conduct and Rules of Engagement for Security Personnel on Election Duty". In view of this document, Situation Room calls on all deployed security agencies and their personnel to abide by these guidelines and remain neutral in their conduct.

Situation Room has observed some level of hostility and unprofessional conduct of some policemen towards accredited media agents and observers during the distribution of election materials at the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Office in Benin on Wednesday, 16th September 2020. Situation Room calls on the leadership of the Nigeria Police Force to call their men to order and enjoin them to be neutral and professional in their conduct.

Situation Room restates that by virtue of section 29(3) of the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended), the Police are the lead agency in election security and all other security agencies should take their lead from them. We further call on the Police Force to document evidence of violence, infractions and their perpetrators and share this information with INEC, in order to speedily bring offenders to book.

3. Political Parties: This election will take place against a very tense political environment characterised by hate speech and rhetoric. Already reports have been received of pre-election violence in some parts of the State, prominently in Akoko-Edo local government. Situation Room is concerned that the conduct of the political actors in the lead up to this election has raised fears of their readiness to eschew violence. Situation Room wishes to remind the political actors of their commitment to the Peace Accord signed by the 14 candidates to guarantee a peaceful atmosphere before, during and after the elections. There is a moral and legal obligation to abide by this agreement and there will be consequences in this regard.

Situation Room calls on the parties to ensure their agents abide by INEC COVID-19 Guidelines as they participate in the electoral process.

Conclusion: Situation Room urges all eligible voters to come out freely to exercise their civic responsibility on Saturday, 19th September 2020 despite the rhetoric of violence. Situation Room enjoins that all voters abide by the health protocols issued by INEC and the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) for their personal safety and safety of persons around them.

Situation Room expects that INEC and indeed all stakeholders in the electoral process would have taken lessons from the challenges of the 2019 Kogi and Bayelsa Governorship Elections and work towards delivering a peaceful and credible Governorship Election in Edo State, especially in view of the fact that this is the first major election to be conducted in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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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