

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

Issued: In Abuja at 11:00am, Monday, 21st September 2020

The Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (Situation Room) is issuing this statement following its observation of the Edo State Governorship election held on Saturday, 19th September 2020 from the commencement of polls to the collation of results.

General: The administration of the Edo State Governorship Election appears to have been a marked improvement on recent previous governorship elections. INEC's processes appeared to operate smoothly. The logistics issues of distribution of materials, deployment of staff and challenges in the Voters' Register were significantly reduced. In addition, security personnel acted professionally.

The usual issues cited such as logistical challenges and overbearing security presence were less of an issue in this election, although the challenge of vote buying/trading was still prevalent. This election was faced by a never before seen challenge of COVID-19 and efforts were made to ensure the safety of persons, although a lot more can be done to ensure compliance. This election showed that Nigeria can learn from previous setbacks in its electoral process and take a step towards achieving credible elections.

Election Administration: Situation Room observed delay in the opening of polls in most polling units, although this did not affect voting thereafter. There was early deployment of materials and officials across several polling units in the State. There were however reports of late commencement of voting in some polling units owing to late arrival of officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). In some cases, this was due to late arrival of security agents at Registration Area Centres (RACs) to escort election officials and materials to polling units, majorly in Edo South Senatorial District.

INEC introduced the use of a Result Viewing Portal to upload polling unit results. This was a commendable action on the part of INEC and Situation Room commends it in its effort at transparency in the electoral process. However, a significant amount of results

were yet to be uploaded, even at the time of collation, raising fears of possible political interference at some polling points.

There was an improved use of Smart Card Readers in the election, as they were widely deployed and utilised across the State. Isolated cases of card reader malfunctions observed were reported to have been rectified, with voting resuming soon afterwards.

Security Situation: On a general note, Situation Room commends the professionalism and conduct of the Police and some of the security agencies deployed for election duty. Reports received by Situation Room indicate that security personnel wore identification tags and intervened to resolve disruptions that arose in some voting locations.

Situation Room however received reports of some Nigerian military personnel harassing and intimidating citizens, including election observers and mounted roadblocks around the vicinity of collation centres in Edo North Senatorial District, firing gunshots and generally being disruptive of the work of election observers seeking to participate in the collation process.

Other incidents of security challenges were a few reports of intimidation of voters and snatching of ballot boxes by thugs in several polling units, including reports from Polling Unit (PU) 4, Ward 7 in Esan West Local Government, PU 2, Ward 7 in Etsako West Local Government and PU 28, Ward 10 in Ikpoba-Okha Local Government. A few other critical incidents of violence were reported, including the shooting of an INEC official in Etsako Central Local Government Area.

Voter Turnout: The voter turnout was low compared to numbers of collected Permanent Voters' Cards (PVCs) registered for the election. This may have been caused by the rhetoric of violence perpetrated by the main candidates and their supporters ahead of election day. There may also have been a reduction in voter turnout caused by the prevailing public health concern of COVID-19.

Vote Buying: The menace of vote trading which includes buying and selling appears to be deepening in Nigeria's elections. Politicians are increasingly investing monies to buy votes with voters appearing to be willing to sell their votes. In the Edo State election, this practice was widespread with all of the major political parties engaging in this infringement.

Compliance with COVID-19 Protocols: This was the first major election conducted in Nigeria since the outbreak of the novel COVID-19. Situation Room acknowledges that

safety tools such as hand sanitizers, methylated spirit and cotton wool for card readers and infrared thermometers were widely provided but observed that the level of compliance with their use and general COVID-19 protocols were unsatisfactory, as safety measures were haphazardly implemented in some areas and ignored totally in other areas, especially as it relates to the use of mandatory use of facemasks and social distancing. Situation Room calls on INEC and the Nigerian election stakeholders to ensure improved compliance with health protocols as provided by INEC and relevant health authorities, especially as we move towards the Ondo State Governorship Election on October 10, 2020.

Conclusion

- Overall, the Edo State governorship election was violence free to the relief of stakeholders who had feared that the violence laden rhetoric of the election participants could pose a threat to peaceful elections. It is noteworthy that efforts at mediating peace and reducing political tension mounted by INEC, the Police, the National Peace Committee, the Benin Monarch, the Oba of Benin and civil society groups paid off. These peace efforts commend themselves to future elections.
- Situation Room commends INEC for introducing the COVID-19 protocols to address the public health concerns caused by the crisis of COVID-19 and urges a greater effort at enforcing the protocols ahead of future elections.
- The incidence of vote buying during this election was high. Situation Room calls for a more effective enforcement of election laws that prohibit vote buying and other election offences. Situation Room calls on the National Assembly to move quickly and urgently proceed with legislative action to ensure the passage of the Electoral Offences Commission Bill that creates a body to enforce respect for election laws.
- Situation Room calls on INEC to deepen and expand the use of its Election Result Viewing portal in order to increase the transparency of Nigeria's elections.
- Situation Room commends INEC for conducting a much improved governorship election in Edo State and urges the Commission to ensure that the progress made with improvements in its conduct of the election are deepened and sustained during the Ondo State Governorship Election scheduled for October 10, 2020.

SIGNED:

Clement Nwankwo

Convener

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 (NWTF), 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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