

**PRELIMINARY STATEMENT BY NIGERIA CIVIL SOCIETY SITUATION ROOM ON ONDO STATE GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION SCHEDULED FOR SATURDAY, 10<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2020**

**Issued: 1:00pm, Friday, 9<sup>th</sup> October 2020**

The Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (Situation Room) is in Akure to observe the Ondo State Governorship election scheduled for Saturday, 10 October 2020. Situation Room has deployed accredited observers across the 18 Local Government Areas (LGAs) of the State to provide information from the field on all stages of the election.

Coming on the heels of the recently held Edo State governorship election, which was largely adjudged peaceful by several observers and stakeholders, it is expected that the gains recorded in Edo State will be improved upon in the Ondo State governorship poll.

**Pre-election Environment**

In the lead up to the elections, the political environment in Ondo State is tense with reports of isolated political clashes between supporters of rival parties, especially with campaigns reaching fever pitch. There have been several reports of violent clashes between supporters of the two leading parties in the State, the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), with the most recent incident reported in Akure, the State capital on Sunday, October 4, 2020. Also, the peculiar circumstance of the Deputy Governor, Agboola Ajayi, contesting for the office of Governor currently occupied by his principal, on the platform of the Zenith Labour Party contributes to the tenuous political environment in the State. There are concerns on how these incidents and the overall state of affairs among the political parties may affect the conduct of the election.

The loss of over 5,000 Smart Card Readers from a fire outbreak in the Ondo State office of the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) also raised concerns over preparations for the election. INEC has however reassured that it has replaced the lost card readers from supplies in neighbouring States and is fully prepared for the conduct of the election.

## **Election Administration**

Situation Room having closely followed the preparations of INEC for the election, is satisfied that the Commission has reiterated its commitment to enhancing its processes for the election. At INEC's Stakeholders' meeting convened in Akure earlier this week, INEC Chairman, Prof. Mahmoud Yakubu stated 16 areas of improvement to be implemented in the election, with particular references made to prompt response to card reader malfunctions, stricter compliance with COVID-19 safety protocols and improved logistical deployment of election personnel and materials. It also announced its engagement with security agencies to deal decisively with the menace of vote buying. In addition, the Commission stated that it will also be deploying the Z-pad technology for uploading polling unit results to its Result Viewing (I-Rev) portal. Situation Room has observed that all sensitive materials for the election have been deployed to the 18 LGAs as at 3.15pm on Thursday, October 8, 2020. Given the peculiar nature of some difficult terrains especially in the riverine areas of Ilaje, Ese-Odo, and similar other places across the State, we call on INEC to facilitate the timely deployment of election materials to the polling units in these affected areas. INEC has equally assured the Situation Room that election materials will reach all RACs today, 9<sup>th</sup> October, 2020.

Situation Room will be looking out for the implementation of these identified areas of improvement and in particular, compliance with the directive of the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19, of "No Face mask, No Voting." Situation Room therefore calls on INEC to ensure that all its logistics arrangements for the election will be deployed optimally and timely, and will take into consideration, provisions for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) and other vulnerable groups.

## **Election Security**

The Inspector General of Police, IGP Mohammed Adamu announced that 33,783 security personnel will be deployed for the election and assured of optimal security for all stakeholders involved in the election. The military also announced the deployment of between 200 to 300 of its personnel, particularly in the coastal areas of the Ondo South Senatorial District. Situation Room reiterates that all sister security agencies deployed on election duty should adhere to the directives of the Nigeria Police, as the lead agency on election security, and abide by the Code of Conduct and Rules of Engagement for Security Personnel on Election Duty.

Situation Room will also be on the look-out for hotspots identified by Civil Society groups working in the area, such as Akoko North East, Akure South and Idanre.

## **Political Parties**

Situation Room is concerned about the inflammatory statements that have pervaded the political space in Ondo State, particularly in the last days of the campaigns, and calls on political parties to restrain from making inciteful comments that will push their supporters to disrupt the electoral process or engage in acts of violence. Situation Room condemns the clash between supporters of the APC and the PDP that occurred in the State capital, Akure on Sunday, October 4, 2020. Political parties and their candidates are enjoined to uphold their commitment to peaceful elections as expressed in the signing of the Peace Accord.

## **Conclusion**

Finally, the Situation Room reminds citizens of Ondo State that the path to progress and development of their State starts with the exercise of their voting right. Given the assurances by INEC and the Nigeria Police Force of their adequate preparations for the election, Situation Room is calling on all stakeholders to effectively engage in the electoral process with a view to delivering a free, fair, credible and peaceful election in Ondo State. Situation Room also appeals to all election stakeholders to abide by the safety protocols issued by relevant authorities to curtail the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, and enjoins the people of Ondo State to come out and exercise their franchise.

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**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, New Initiative for Social Development 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, LAPDO, Partners West Africa and several other CSOs numbering more than seventy.**

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