

**SECOND INTERIM STATEMENT BY NIGERIA CIVIL SOCIETY
SITUATION ROOM ON THE OCTOBER 10, 2020 ONDO STATE
GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION**

Issued in Akure: 9:00 am, Sunday, 11th October 2020

The Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (Situation Room) is issuing this statement following its observation of the 10th October 2020 Ondo State Governorship Election.

GENERAL

The conduct of the Ondo State Governorship Election appears to have built on the gains of the recently conducted Edo State governorship election, and is a marked improvement in recent previously conducted elections. Again, INEC's processes improved and was mostly hitch-free. This was also evident in the relatively smooth Ward Collation process. On the positive side also, the reports indicate professional conduct of security personnel. There was however, isolated incidents of logistical challenges.

The menace of vote-buying is still prevalent in the electoral process, with several reports of the trend worsening. Although there are concerns over observance of COVID-19 prevention protocols, there was marked improvement from the most recently conducted governorship elections.

Voter turnout was generally low across the State, which raises questions about decreasing citizens participation in elections in Nigeria, and what needs to be done to address the problem, going forward.

ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

Situation Room commends INEC for improving on timely commencement of polls - a marked improvement from the earlier conducted Edo State Governorship election.

Situation Room observed early commencement of polls in most voting locations across the State. Smart Card Readers were widely used to accredit voters and in several instances of card reader failure, technical support was provided to rectify the situation.

The introduction and use of the Z-pad for uploading of collated polling results is a major improvement of the election process, because of the heightened transparency that this has brought to our elections.

Upon completion of the voting process, Situation Room observed a 100% complete upload of results to the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) in 11 of the 18 LGAs in Ondo State, after about eight hours of close of polls. Although the use of this platform is still relatively new, Situation Room urges INEC to continue to improve on the technology and practice, in order to assure citizens of the increased transparency in our electoral system and as a tool for overseeing the results collation process.

The overall negative weather conditions as well as the heavy rain downpour, experienced in parts of the State on the election day was a restraining factor to the effective participation of voters in the process. This resulted in some instances to the emergency relocation of polling units and materials to private residences, which is a clear violation of the principle of neutrality as contained in the electoral laws. It must also be noted that even after the rains stopped and weather conditions improved, polling units that were moved to private residences, were not returned to their original locations.

A notable observation was the preference given to persons with disabilities, the elderly, pregnant women and nursing mothers in the voting process. While acknowledging the laudable efforts of INEC to make special provisions for the peculiarities of PWDs, Situation Room observed that some polling units were inaccessible to this class of voters owing to such impediments as difficult topography, and drainages. The following polling units fall under this category; PU-001, ward 2, Adomu, Akure South; PU-018, ward 2, Aje-Bamidele, Akure South, and PU-035, ward 2, Owonifari, Isikan West, Akure South LGA.

Situation Room deployed Ward Collation observers across the State. It was observed that Ward Collation centres were accessible and the collation process concluded in an orderly manner, to a large extent. It would appear that INEC made strides in implementing the areas of improvement identified by the INEC Chairman, prior to the conduct of the election. There is however, always room for further improvement.

ELECTION SECURITY

In spite of the tense political environment and threats of violence that preceded the election, the exercise was largely peaceful, with only very few violent incidents recorded. Reports received by Situation Room indicate that security agents deployed for election duty conducted themselves properly. They intervened in some cases to settle altercations that arose at polling units and assisted the polling officials to ensure compliance with COVID-19 protocols and crowd control. Situation Room believes that the relatively general calm atmosphere that attended the conduct of the election was as a result of the

deliberate intervention of the security services, the efforts of civil society in helping build peace, as well as the resolve of the people of Ondo State to have a peaceful election. Situation Room commends the security services for the professionalism exhibited throughout the duration of the election. A major drawback however, was the inability of security operatives to intervene in the blatant cases of vote buying and selling, reported in most polling units during the election.

Situation Room's observers also noted the presence of security personnel during the collation process, which contributed to the generally peaceful conclusion of the process. It is significant to note that there was no report of ballot box snatching throughout the election in polling units visited.

VOTER TURNOUT

Voter turnout was very low in compared to the number of registered voters who collected their Permanent Voters' Cards (PVCs). In many polling units, voting was concluded well ahead of the close of polls slated for 2:30pm, with election officials waiting to sort and count the votes cast. It is unclear what all the factors are, that contributed to the low voter turnout. Situation Room notes however, that a lot of work needs to be done by INEC, the political parties and civil society organisations to find innovative ways of reducing voter apathy, including civic education, and drive turn out by voters.

VOTE BUYING

Vote buying has sadly, become a staple in the electoral process in Nigeria. Despite INEC stating that it was liaising with security agents to arrest the situation, the incidents of this trend increased in the Ondo State Governorship election. Reports received by Situation Room showed that vote buying was evident in a number of polling units and largely went unchecked.

Voters were seen selling their votes for sums ranging from N4,000 and N5,000, to N7,000, depending on the political parties or location. The improper positioning of voting cubicles and ballot boxes in some polling units observed, made it easier for party agents to deduce patterns of voting as the secrecy of the ballot was not observed.

Situation Room calls on INEC, security agents and other stakeholders to seek out more practical ways of enforcing punitive measures against offenders, to serve as a deterrent to political actors and the electorate, moving forward.

ADHERENCE TO COVID19 PROTOCOLS

Situation Room observed a marginal improvement in the adherence to COVID-19 guidelines issued by health authorities, compared to the recently held Edo State Governorship election.

In particular, the “No Face Mask, No Voting” directive was observed to have been breached in some instances. Although, the necessary safety materials, such as hand sanitisers and infrared thermometers were provided by INEC, there was the inability to manage polling queues and safety protocols, especially as this required the cooperation of voters, who were at most times unmanageable and could not be bothered to use face masks or observe social distancing.

CONCLUSION

INEC improved over their performance in the recently held Edo State Governorship Election, the voting process was relatively successful and would seem to indicate a growing consistency of relatively successfully conducted elections by INEC. Obviously, there are still lapses observed that should be improved upon by the electoral body. Some of these observations have been highlighted above.

The Ondo State Governorship election was relatively violence free, despite the political tension created and earlier signs of likely threats to peaceful elections and the campaigns reaching fever pitch.

Situation Room commends INEC for its general administration of the election with improvements recorded in the compliance with COVID-19 protocols, logistical arrangements and commencement of polls. With the incidence of vote buying continuing to prevail, Situation Room renews its call for more effective enforcement of election laws that prohibit vote buying and other electoral offences and for quick legislative action to be taken on the passage of the Electoral Offences Commission Bill. Situation Room applauds the continued use of the Election Result Viewing Portal and calls on INEC to build on its gains for increased transparency in the electoral process. Lastly, Situation Room calls on all stakeholders to utilise the time before the next off-cycle governorship election to make significant progress on Constitutional and electoral reform efforts towards enhancing the legal framework governing elections in Nigeria.

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 (NWTF), 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 (CHRCCR), 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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