

WELCOME SPEECH BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CENTRE FOR TRANSPARENCY ADVOCACY (CTA) DURING THE SOUTH-SOUTH STAKEHOLDER'S MEETING IN PREPARATIONS TOWARDS THE 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS HELD AT BISHOP KELLY PASTORAL CENTRE, BENIN CITY ON JANUARY 10, 2023.

Protocols

It is with great pleasure that I welcome everyone to this Stakeholder's conversation on the 2023 General Elections a few weeks away. Expectations and hopes are high because of the keenness exhibited by citizens whose interest is to ensure that their votes count.

The Centre for Transparency Advocacy, an accredited Domestic Observer Group like many other stakeholders, is preparing for the election with the mandate to contribute its quota towards a free, fair, peaceful, inclusive, conclusive, and credible elections. To this effect, the CTA will be engaging various stakeholders to gauge the pulse and preparations of the citizens and the Election Management Body towards the election.

ELECTION STATISTICS

The 2023 General Election is upon us, in 46 days' time, the Presidential and National assembly elections will be holding. INEC in its style issued the notice of election on 28th February 2022 and listed 14 activities, which we have observed that the commission is implementing and on course.

INEC announced that over 93.5 million Nigerians are eligible to participate in the 2023 General Elections and is expected to publish the official register of voters for the election by 12th January 2023 that is in 2days time

Also, according to records from INEC, after the suspension of Continuous Voter Registration (CVR) on July 31, the number of persons who completed their registration was announced to be 12,298,944.

Equally, after cleaning up the voter data using the automated biometric identification system (ABIS), a total of 2,780,756 (22.6 percent) were identified as ineligible registrants and invalidated from the record. Interestingly, the South-South with 2,458,095 new registrants is the region with the second highest number of new registrants. The South-South which comprises Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers States had the number of registered voters in the zone rise from 12.8 million to 15.2 million.

“In terms of demographic distribution, 7.2 million new voters or 76.5% are young people between 18-34 years while there is a slightly higher number of female (4.8 million or 50.82%) than male (4.6 million or 49.18%) voters. In terms of occupation, 3.8 million (40.8%) are students.

This election if described as the election by the young people will not be out of place.

RECENT CONCERNS

SECURITY AND BURNING OF INEC FACILITIES: Security is a critical aspect of the electoral process that requires attention during the entire electoral process and INEC has recently

raised an alarm indicating that insecurity may stall the 2023 elections. Citizens too have had cause to worry over the ugly and alarming trend of burning INEC offices and materials in recent times. This dangerous and criminal act if unchecked could pose a grave danger to the 2023 General Elections.

At last count there had been about 42 incidents and attacks in 14 states of the Federation. The type of attacks includes bandits' attacks, Post-Election Attacks, Boko haram, Thuggery on election day, Unknown Gun men and Hoodlums, End SARS, among others.

All men and women of goodwill should condemn these senseless attacks while joining hands to quench this ugly trend. We expect better synergy between the police, the lead security agency on election security and other members of the Inter-agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCESS) with stakeholders on election.

We will be glad if the security agencies will share important information with other stakeholders, especially on flash points. Also, ensure that their personnel are properly trained in accordance with the following documents and policies on election security.

- I. The Electoral Security Personnel (ESP) Training Manual
- II. The Electoral Security Personnel (ESP) Training Facilitators Guide
- III. The Electoral Security (ESP) Handbook
- IV. The Basic Security in Election Duty (BaSED) Handbook.

MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION THROUGH THE MEDIA/SOCIAL MEDIA:

The social media have no doubt made communication easy in real time, but it also has its dark sides. Fake news hatched by unscrupulous elements to distort information and create chaos as we approach the 2023 General Elections are often spread through social media. We appeal that this should not be reinforced by the mainstream media in any guise. Neutrality by the mainstream media is key to dousing the negative effects of misinformation.

Information must be verified before sharing, CTA commends the Voter Education and media team of INEC on its proactiveness in correcting the misinformation through their timely press releases. Where there is a doubt on any information on the election, we should look up to INEC for the right information

MONEY POLITICS:

It has become imperative to say NO to money politics, all forms of inducement and money laundering associated with our politics and elections. citizens' choices must never be subverted by the negative use of money to influence votes including the criminal purchases of PVCs by politicians.

We recognize clearly that the symbolic presence of law enforcement agents at polling units on election has not deterred vote buying. It is, therefore, important that a more result-oriented method like covert operations be adopted to curb this menace. An early warning flagging by the Central bank and Commercial institutions will as well alert anti-graft agencies to track illicit money intended to usurp the wills of the people through rigging of elections induced by money.

The recent initiative of collaborating with the EFCC, ICPC, NFIU, NBC, IPAC and other stakeholders by INEC during the stakeholders' summit aimed at addressing the influence of money on the 2023 general election must be encouraged and the decisions reached implemented.

LOGISTICAL ARRANGEMENTS:

One of the greatest challenges faced by INEC on election days is the movement of personnel and materials. This has severely hampered operations, leading to delay in commencement of elections. It was for this reason that the Commission signed the first MoU with the NURTW in January 2015". For ease of movement of materials and personnel on election day, INEC has expanded this pool by bringing in NARTO and the Maritime Workers Union. A commendable move in the right direction.

In the past, even with signed MOUs, some of the transport owners have played pranks that seriously jeopardized the electoral process and elections. This time around, in the words of the INEC chairman, "They must see their role as a national call to duty by ensuring that there is no failure on their part, especially on the eve of elections when it is too late for the Commission to make alternative arrangement". Therefore, we appeal to the Unions to keep an eye on their members "to ensure that when they take personnel and materials to designated locations, they also bring them back at the end of the elections."

According to INEC, the umpire will require over 100,000 vehicles and about 4,200 boats that will be accompanied by naval gunboats to be able to cover the 774 Local Government Areas, 8,809 electoral Wards and 176,846 polling units across Nigeria.

PVC COLLECTION:

The CTA is impressed with the zeal and enthusiasm shown by citizens that have trouped to INEC offices across the 774 LGAs to collect their Permanent Voters Card. However, there are reports that politicians are buying off PVC cards from citizens or asking citizens to give out their card numbers. This is condemnable and uncalled for; security agencies must investigate this and ensure that those found wanting are apprehended.

As a citizen, you should realize that The PVC is your pride, hold it firmly.

PEACE ACCORD:

It is important at this juncture to remind the politicians of the Peace Accord that they voluntarily signed. This has become important as the heat of the elections and campaigns have intensified.

It is reported that within a month – 8 October to 9 November, a total of 52 election-related acts of violence were recorded in 22 states. This number is scary and must not be allowed to fester. We call on politicians to respect the peace accord that they voluntarily signed, reign in their supporters, respect other candidates, stop the use of abusive words and above all, shun violence as we have only one country that we can call our own.

Call to Action:

It is my hope, wish and belief that this meeting will afford us the opportunity to have a conversation with all of us here as stakeholders, genuinely interact, examine issues and the situation in relation to the 2023 General Elections. A key outcome expected from this meeting is the commitment from stakeholders to ensure a peaceful, credible, free, fair, inclusive, and conclusive elections come February and March.

It is our belief that the security agencies with INEC will serve the interest of the people while building on their recent successes in the last off-season elections especially the Ekiti and Osun States governorship elections by the deployment of improved technology such as the Bi-modal Voter Accreditation System (B-VAS).

It is also important as stakeholders to ensure that all voices are heard, especially those of the vulnerable groups such as women, youth and people living with disability.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we advise that citizens should shun voting buying and selling which undermines the election, that candidates should campaign based on issues and not for heating up the polity and creating fears in the hearts of people who want to vote. Also, security agencies should assure the masses of adequate protection within the election periods.

The Centre for Transparency Advocacy (CTA) an election observation group having observed elections in the country and all the off-season elections leading to the 2023 general elections will be observing this election by deploying observers across the 774 Local Government Areas in Nigeria. These observers will be trained on Election Observation and adherence to INEC Election Guidelines. At this meeting, we have in attendance representatives from the six south south states who will be observing the elections with CTA.

The CTA will also be setting up an Election Day Situation Room in Abuja to receive reports in real time from the field observers.

CTA most sincerely appreciates INEC, the security agencies, traditional rulers, religious leaders, professional organizations, CSOs, and other participants who in one way or the other will be adding value to this meeting.

We appeal for cooperation with all stakeholders and support for election observers across the country especially the CTA deployed observers.

Once again, I sincerely welcome everyone and wish you fruitful deliberation.

Thank you.

Faith Nwadishi.
Executive Director