

**STATEMENT OF THE CARTER CENTER/NDI
OBSERVER DELEGATION TO THE NIGERIAN
1999 NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS**

February 22, 1999

The Carter Center and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) were pleased to observe the peaceful conduct of the February 20 elections for the Senate and House of Representatives, and we reaffirm our strong support for the transition process in Nigeria. Voting in many places adhered to electoral regulations, but our observers noted low voter turnout throughout the country and witnessed serious irregularities in several areas.

In some cases, abuses of the electoral process were widespread enough to call into question the outcome of elections in certain constituencies and senatorial zones. Our observers documented numerous cases of ballot box stuffing, inflated vote tallies, and other manipulations of results committed by members of all three political parties and poll officials. We have reported our findings to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

We call on the political parties and INEC to take immediate corrective action, where appropriate, to ensure the integrity of the February 27 presidential election and to build on the progress of the previous rounds of voting. Specific recommendations follow.

The Delegation and Its Work

The Carter Center and NDI are in Nigeria to assess the evolving political environment, offer an impartial report on the third of four elections, and demonstrate the support of the international community for Nigeria's developing democratic process. We have maintained an in-country presence in Nigeria since November 1998 to monitor the transition process. The two organizations will bring a 60-member multinational delegation to Nigeria this week to observe and assess the presidential elections and are providing ongoing assistance to the work of the Transitional Monitoring Group (TMG), a coalition of NGOs that will field as many as 10,000 domestic election monitors.

For the February 20 National Assembly elections, ten observer teams traveled to nine states and the Federal Capital Territory, where they visited more than 150 polling sites, collation centers and INEC offices in 20 Local Government Areas. The observers coordinated with international and domestic observer groups in each state. They also met with a cross-section of Nigerian political party leaders, election officials, journalists, and representatives of nongovernmental organizations.

Delegation Findings and Concerns

Given the size of Nigeria and the limited number of polling stations visited, the delegation did not attempt to carry out a comprehensive assessment of the February 20 election. Despite the difficult conditions under which these elections were held, our observers reported that most voting was orderly and peaceful. In several states we visited, elections were conducted in accordance with INEC procedures. Polling agents, party officials, and voters in these states worked to uphold the integrity of the electoral process.

However, low voter turnout and several important shortcomings were noted that warrant serious attention. Irregularities and abuses were especially troubling in Enugu, Rivers, and Kaduna states.

Low Voter Turnout

The delegation observed that turnout for the Senate and House elections was notably lower than for previous elections.

- *10 -15% Turnout* -- In most parts of the country our observers and members of other international delegations reported a turnout of 10 to 15 percent of registered voters, a significant drop in participation from last month's election.
- *Low Participation by Women* -- As in previous elections, our observers noted very low participation of women at the polls.

Inconsistent Application of Voting Procedures

The delegation observed that many poll officials failed to abide by the voting procedures outlined in the INEC manual.

- *Secrecy of the Ballot* -- Little effort was made to ensure the secrecy of the ballot; however, most voters did not seem concerned with the lack of privacy or secrecy.
- *Late Opening of Polls* -- Many polling sites did not open until 10:00 a.m. and some opened as late as 2:00 p.m. Some polling sites never opened. This delay in opening was usually due to poor distribution of voting materials.
- *Materials Late or Lacking* -- Ballot papers and other essential materials often did not reach polling sites on time in many areas. This was usually due to a lack of vehicles and fuel. When materials were distributed, several observers noted that few measures were taken to secure sensitive materials, with boxes of ballots left unattended at polling stations.
- *Indelible Ink* -- There were numerous reports of misapplication or non-use of indelible ink.

Election Irregularities

Observers in several parts of the country witnessed widespread voting irregularities and electoral fraud.

- *Ballot Box Stuffing* -- Several observers witnessed ballot boxes that clearly appeared to have been stuffed with ballots marked by the same person's fingerprint or neatly stacked in sequential order. At a number of polling sites, observers witnessed poll officials and party representatives fraudulently voting multiple times by thumb-printing stacks of ballots in plain view of voters and observers.
- *Inflation of Results* -- In many cases, observers noted that at the close of accreditation low numbers of voters had been accredited - usually less than 15 percent. However, later in the day when observers visited collation centers they found that the same polling stations were reporting high numbers of voters -- up to 100 percent of registered voters. Observers also visited polling stations where at one moment there were no voters in line and less than ten ballots in the box, only to return 15 minutes later to find that 200 or 300 ballots had been cast with no voters in sight.
- *Intimidation* - Party members, poll officials, and groups of young men ("area boys") were seen at several polling stations verbally intimidating voters and attempting to disrupt the electoral process.

Recommendations

1. INEC should acknowledge that irregularities occurred in this election and should publicly state that such behavior is illegal and will not be tolerated. INEC needs to take immediate action to guarantee the integrity of the presidential election in order to ensure that the results are seen as legitimate by the people of Nigeria and the international community.
2. Political party leaders should swiftly address misconduct by their members and ensure that those who perpetrated abuses are held accountable for their actions.
3. Voter education by INEC and the political parties should be heightened over the next three days to urge voters to participate in the presidential election and to prevent large numbers of invalid votes from being cast.
4. INEC officials should make every effort to ensure that voting procedures are followed by all INEC representatives throughout the country. This includes the timely distribution of election materials, which is subject to providing adequate fuel and transportation. Most important, local polling officials should be instructed to seek immediate assistance from security officials or senior INEC personnel at the first sign of electoral misconduct.

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