

INTERIM STATEMENT FROM THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE OF NIGERIA(CBCN) SITUATION ROOM

Preamble:

The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, through its agency, Caritas Nigeria, in collaboration with the Justice Development and Peace Commissions, set up a Situation Room for the purposes of collation and aggregation of reports of the 2019 General Elections from field observers selected from 55 dioceses spread across the 36 States and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). To this effect, the Catholic Church has actively engaged **3,823 accredited Observers**, and **9,000 Citizen Observers** to enhance data collection and collation during the said 2019 General Elections. Leveraging on the capillary nature of the Church, a widespread information network has been established on the Parish, Deanery, Diocesan and National levels. The situation room focused on the electoral indices logistics, security, Smart Card Reader failure, discrepancies and voter inducements.

General Electoral Disposition

According to INEC report, more than **84 million citizens** were registered; while **72.8 million persons** collected their Permanent Voter's Cards. And about **825,543 Ad hoc Staff**, **80,000 vehicles** and **996 boats** for operations and logistics, were deployed across the country to effect hitch-free and credible elections. The situation room observed that there was massive turn-out of voters for the 2019 General Elections which was due to improved voter awareness. Major stakeholders such as the Media, Civil Society Organizations, National and International Observers, the Security, etc. were reasonably engaged during the elections.

General Observations

1. Logistics/Arrival of Electoral Officers

Report of logistical lapses on the part of INEC was widespread, as electoral officers did not arrive on the time stipulated for voting. As a result, many locations, experienced late arrival of voting materials and this impacted negatively on the exercise. Many polling units in the South-South experienced delayed commencement of elections. A similar situation is found in the South-east, most noticeable in Enugu, Anambra and Abia States which reported very low amounts of electoral materials, in addition to the late commencement of voting. This scenario led to slight civil unrests. In the North-Central region: Mararaba, Nasarawa State for instance, voting commenced grossly late; a little after 1:30 pm. Unit 004 of Sabongari, Nasawara State had it even worse; accreditation began at 3:45 pm owing to

late arrival of INEC Officials and the materials. A similar situation was reported in many states in the North-west and North-east regions of the country. Nevertheless, at Enuobodo Ward, Umueri town, Anambra East LGA in Anambra State, accreditation commenced in good time and the voting was conducted in an orderly manner.

2. Security:

Reports from across the country indicated some degree of relative neutrality. In many parts of the country, the elections to had been conducted in a relatively conducive atmosphere. In some parts of Edo State like Benin and Uromi, voting was reported to be peaceful, as voting in many polling units started at exactly 8am. Nevertheless, some areas identified as flash points had slim presence of security officials. Hence, the deployment of security personnel to some areas was not balanced; while some huge populated polling units reportedly had fewer security agents, the reverse was the case in other less populated areas. The Situation Room observed the parlous security situation in the North-East region of the county. In Maiduguri- Borno State, for instance, there were attacks by suspected Boko Haram members in the early morning of the voting day.

In the North-central, a nineteen-year-old young man was shot dead in Ajetachi, Dekina LGA in polling unit in Anyigba for refusing to vote a party contrary to his choice.

The South-east had its own episode of insecurity. In Ndiokolo unit, Orumba North Local Government Area of Anambra State, a Corp member serving as an Ad hoc staff of the Independent National Electoral Commission was kidnapped while on duty. Even more, there were other incidences recorded such as the ballot box snatching at Onuma Imeobi Square ward 6, unit 4, in Onitsha-Anambra state. There were even cases of vote buying and disruption of election in some polling unites.

Similarly, in the South-south, there were reports of several killings and arrests made of suspected thugs who attempted to snatch ballot boxes. In Rivers State specifically, electoral violence were rife and about 6 deaths were recorded, with many voters prevented from voting due to clashes between suspected party thugs. The Situation Room also observed a low turn-out of voters at Akim Primary School on Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida Way, Calabar, Cross-River State, because the residents reportedly had fears about their security. In Akwa Ibom State, Unit 1, Ward 8, Itu LGA, Ikot Ekeang, armed men hijacked voting materials and abducted officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission and the Youth Corpers on duty. Two persons were shot by armed men in Bayelsa State. Amukpe, Delta State had a case of unknown gunmen opening fire at a polling unit, with stray bullets killing two persons, leaving several persons injured.

Regardless of the presence of security personnel at the polls, Lagos State, in Baba Ewe Okota in particular, had its episode of electoral crisis and casualty for the reason that the opposition was in an early lead. Cast votes were burnt and voters chased by suspected thugs. In Ibadan, armed men stormed a polling unit, shooting at people and snatching ballot boxes. In Osun State, INEC office was attacked leading to the burning of electoral materials.

3. Smart Card Reader Failure

Despite the Commission's assurances that they were ready for the elections, the Situation Room observed that there were replete reports of technical glitches of Smart Card Readers in certain States in the North, such as Zamfara, Sokoto, Kebbi, Jigawa, Kaduna, FCT, Nasarawa, Ogun, Lagos, Imo and Abia States. This inevitably led to delayed voting in the affected areas as well as resorting to manual accreditation.

4. Discrepancies/Illegal Voter Inducements

The Situation Room expresses concern over the repeated cases of vote-buying during electoral processes in the country. Sadly, inducement reportedly occurred in many polling units across the country; particularly in Benue, Anambra, Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Borno, Niger, Lagos, Edo, and Kwara States, leading to negative impact on the elections and with inadequate number of security personnel in the affected areas. Apart from clouding the judgement of voters, vote buying negatively impacts on the democratic process of free and fair elections. Received reports showed that vote buying influenced voters' free choice.

In terms of electoral discrepancies, the competence and capacity of the Commission were questioned by the electorate in areas such as AYA, in Abuja, where INEC Officials arrived the polling unit with already thumb-printed ballot papers – a situation which they purported to be misplaced ballot papers from Police Force Headquarters (Area 11) polling unit.

Conclusion:

We, therefore, appeal to the INEC to ensure credible procedures and absolute transparency in the electoral processes across the country in order to sustain public trust and confidence in the elections. Governments at all levels, are encouraged to ensure the full engagement of security personnel in quelling clashes during and after the elections. The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria is grateful

to all Nigerians for their resilience and admonishes INEC to improve on the electoral systems and processes for the purposes of credible and transparent future elections in Nigeria.

Signed:

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