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<p>THE 2007 PRE-ELECTION ASSESSMENT REPORT THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA</p>
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GENERAL

Abuja, Nigeria – The Institute for Advancement of Democracy (TIAD) early in the year, sent a high level delegation of its team to Nigeria to assess the level of the preparedness of the 2007 general elections in the country. TIAD also announced today that its team is already in Nigeria as part of the international observers for the April 2007 elections.

The high level delegation was part of the Institute's continued commitment towards playing a vital role in the upcoming elections. The Institute has maintained strong presence in the country in the months leading up to the general elections.

The purpose of the pre-election assessment was to determine the country's preparation for the elections, the electoral environment, and the level of support enjoyed by relevant agencies leading up to the April polls, as well as, a report on the status of the electoral process so far, following the Principles for International Election Observation standards adopted by the United Nations in 2005.

The delegation team met with those in government, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), political parties, civil society organizations (CSO), and the representatives of some international organizations.

TIAD understands that no election could be viewed in isolation, but rather should take into consideration all aspects of the electoral process: the constitution, the electoral act, various related court decisions, the ability of the citizens and political parties to freely engage in the political process, the voter registration process, and other reforms being initiated by INEC. With the above at core, the Institute made the following observations and/or recommendations and conclusions.

COUNTRY PROFILE

Nigeria is a Federal Republic with 36 states and a capitol territory of Abuja. In May 1999 a new constitution went into effect. Section 153 established the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). In 2002 and 2006, the National Assembly gave the INEC specific powers to conduct, national elections, voter and civic education, promote knowledge of sound democratic election processes, and maintain a National Register of Voters.

VOTER REGISTRATION

Part III of the 2006 Electoral Act Section 17 states: “The Commission (INEC) shall design, print, and control the issuance of voter’s cards to voters where names appear on the Register.”

Our observations on the ground and in meetings with election officials at various locations revealed a vigorous and innovative voter registration effort. The INEC voter registration effort was initially hindered by Direct Data Capture machines from foreign vendors, which failed to perform in the field as expected. The resilient INEC used laptops with web cameras and fingerprinting capacity to continue the voter registration. This exercise as completed, should improve the credibility of the election results.

Voter registration venues will serve as polling places for the election. INEC has established 120,000 polling places throughout Nigeria. The INEC estimates each polling place will handle on average, about 500 voters in the April, 2007 general elections. The smaller number will help avoid long lines and facilitate the tabulation of election results at each polling place.

The new voter registration methodology is remarkable because it lends itself to a continuous voter registration exercise at anytime during the year; meaning that registration does not only have to be done once every four years.

VOTER EDUCATION

Radio, television, newspaper articles about the election and the candidates are planned to continue through the final weeks leading up to the election. Civil society organizations are encouraged to partner with INEC in ensuring a credible 2007 elections.

TRANSPARENCY

It is our belief that INEC is operating in an open and transparent manner, communicating with the government, political parties, candidates and the public in matters of high importance to a successful election process. Clear rules were established for candidates eligibility, challenge to candidacy qualifications, and replacement of candidates through an open process. Election time table and schedule of activities were established for the 2007 general elections.

The various National and Stakeholders Forums organized by INEC for the purpose of empowering Nigerians through civic education on the electoral process is a step in the right direction, and should continue beyond the elections.

REFORMS

The Nigerian public by all accounts is more optimistic about the expected outcome of 2007 elections over the 2003 elections. There is overwhelming belief that each vote will be counted this time because of various innovative steps initiated and implemented by the Electoral Commission. Some of the critical initiatives include the Electoral Institute for educating more election officers; instant electronic transmission of results versus carrying ballot boxes to counting stations as in the past; candidate's pictures on election materials to help the uneducated voters identify their choices; strong emphasis on violent free elections to encourage participation, use of International Technical Advisory Committee team to incorporate best election practices around the world.

MEDIA

TIAD delegation noted from its investigations and observations that INEC is significantly more prepared for the elections than the country is aware of, and the initiatives implemented by the Commission are beyond any comparative standard in any country's history at this stage. This suggests that INEC needs to do more effective job in communicating with the general public on these matters of great importance and interest. A strong presence in the media highlighting important initiatives and vital information for public education and consumption is highly encouraged.

RECOMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

It is our opinion that INEC has established a foundation for the first fully democratic election since gaining independence. The government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is prepared through INEC to conduct a credible, free and fair election that would be observed by duly accredited members of the international community.

INEC's decision to capture election results both electronically and through manual tabulation on hard copy with representatives of various parties, monitors and observers present in each polling center will clearly enhance the credibility and accuracy of the election results.

In light of some intentional negative publicity and by the virtue of independence of INEC where it is accused of being in the pocket of the government in power, and the government in power may be uncomfortable with some of its reforms, it becomes critical that the Commission step up its media and public relations activities for the benefit of the general public, considering the country's history in past elections. The general public need to know the reforms the Commission has done to ensure a credible 2007 elections.

INEC must continue to collaborate with credible civil society organizations, religious leaders, political parties, and the police to ensure the success of the election process.

The Institute for Advancement of Democracy, Inc (TIAD) is a not-for-profit organization whose primary objective is to promote the advancement of democracy around the world with particular reference to the developing countries of Africa. The Institute seeks to encourage leaders of these developing democracies to develop and institute democratic ideals that would help their countries advance to a full participatory democracy.