



Press release

Serious operational shortcomings put undue burden on voters; civil society enhanced electoral accountability

Abuja, 25 February 2019

The European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) to Nigeria has concluded that the 23 February elections were marked by serious operational shortcomings resulting in delays but that, positively, civil society played a vital role in enhancing the transparency and accountability of the electoral process.

Presenting the mission's preliminary statement in Abuja, EU Chief Observer, Maria Arena, said that INEC operated in a difficult environment and made a number of improvements since 2015, including the introduction of continuous accreditation and voting. But she noted serious shortcomings in INEC's operations and also the need for regular communication and transparency. The last-minute postponement of the elections, and the delayed start to voting on 23 February, placed an undue burden on voters.

"Going forward, there is a great need for more transparency and communication during the whole process, with political parties, civil society, the media and, most importantly, citizens," said Ms Arena.

The EU EOM concluded that the elections were competitive and that candidates were able to campaign freely, although it stated that campaign rhetoric became more acrimonious closer to election day. The mission expressed sadness at the loss of life in violent incidents during the campaign and on election day. "On behalf of the mission, may I offer our sincere condolences to the families and friends of those who lost their lives. Elections should be occasions of peaceful participation," said the Chief Observer.

On the media, the mission's media monitoring found that, positively, the federal government-owned radio, as well as leading commercial broadcasters at national and regional level offered a diversity of views. However, there was clear partisan programming by the Nigerian Television Authority, state-run media, and local commercial radio stations owned by politicians. This gave advantage to incumbents at federal and state level.

On election day, 91 EU observers saw opening, voting and closing processes at 261 polling units, and the collation of results at 94 centres across 31 states and the Federal Capital Territory. Polling procedures were not always followed, and in 14 per cent some essential materials were missing. Positively, in almost all observations of counting, party agents received copies of results forms. However, there were problems in filling out results forms and they were not displayed in half the units observed, weakening transparency.

On the legal framework for elections, the EU EOM said there had been positive changes to the Constitution since the last elections, including reducing some of the minimum age requirements to be a candidate, meaning a more inclusive process. But the lack of further

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legal change was a missed opportunity.

The EU EOM emphasised the importance of transparency and accountability of institutions involved in elections. The Chief Observer, Maria Arena, remarked that Nigeria was fortunate to have so many civil society organisations, which have effectively contributed to election reform, voter awareness and scrutiny of the process. “Their coordinated independent observation of different aspects of the elections is a positive contribution to the accountability of the process,” she highlighted.

The mission will continue to observe the collation process, the announcement of results, as well as any petitions. Its observers will also follow electoral preparations and the campaign for the governorship and State House of Assembly elections due on 9 March. It will remain in Nigeria until the beginning of April. A final report, including recommendations for future elections, will be published approximately two months later.

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Note to Editors: The European Union was invited to deploy an election observation mission for the general elections by the Independent National Electoral Commission. The EU EOM assessed the extent to which the electoral process complied with international and regional commitments for elections, as well as with the laws of Nigeria. The EU EOM is independent of EU institutions, the Delegation of the European Union to Nigeria and EU member states.

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