

**Project Launch of the EU-Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria (EU-SDGN)  
Project**

**1<sup>st</sup> February, 2018**

**Welcome Remarks by the European Union Ambassador to Nigeria and ECOWAS**

**Mr. Ketil Karlsen**

**Protocol**

His Excellency, the Honourable Minister of Budget and  
National Planning, Distinguished Senator Udo Udoma

His Excellency, the Chairman of the Independent National  
Electoral Commission, Prof. Mahmood Yakubu

Distinguished Senators and Honourable Members Present

Representatives of Political Parties

Members of the Diplomatic Community

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

I am truly delighted to be here this morning for this  
important event where we launch a flagship partnership  
programme between the EU and Nigeria.

One of the crown jewels in our otherwise very ample  
collaboration with the country.

For without democracy, there is no stable development and without stable development there will not be the ample opportunities for all Nigerians that we would all like to see.

So when we launch today our support to democratic governance, we are not only dealing with political systems in isolation, we are dealing with core rights and services for all Nigerians.

The very foundation of inclusive growth, social welfare, peace and stability.

We have as the EU a long term commitment to democracy and unity, and we understand this is a noble cause that should never be left unattended, neither within European borders, nor anywhere in the world.

Therefore the European Union has provided financial and technical support to key electoral institutions and stakeholders since the return to democratic rule in Nigeria in 1999. And we have been present at every single general election with EU observers since then.

All in all we have committed over a hundred million Euros have been so far. Some 44 billion Nairas.

And with the program we launch today we have added support in the order of 26.5 million Euros focusing on 5 components with the following themes;

- Improved quality of electoral administration in Nigeria
- Effective discharge of legislative function in compliance with democratic principles and standards
- Enhanced pluralism, tolerance, internal democracy and equality of opportunity of political parties and the political party system
- Fair, accurate and ethical coverage of the electoral process by the Media, including radio and social media
- Women, Youths and Marginalized Citizens; Civil Society Organisations and other relevant agencies contribute to enhancing the electoral process.

We understand that the chain is never stronger than its weakest link...

So with this programme we include all main stakeholders and promote that they do not work only in isolation, but in mutually reinforcing interventions in order to reach a redoubled impact on democracy.

Now if there is any success to such a programme it is building on national leadership. We are not here to promote a one size fits all European model; we are here to support the Nigerian approach under Nigerian leadership.

And to ensure that, the identification and formulation of the project was done in consultation with the Nigerian Government through the ministry of Budget and National Planning, INEC, CSOs and other key stakeholders.

Recognising that there are challenges of course, but also that there is plenty to build on.

Frankly, I think many European national institutions would shiver or even crumble if they had to manage 178 elections in 3 years such as INEC has done since 2015.

So we see potential for Nigerian leadership not only within the borders of the country itself, but in the region too and on the world stage.

Your excellencies,

This is our aim: To contribute to the reinforcement of democracy in Nigeria and beyond through building strong, effective and legitimate democratic institutions.

Anchored in the priorities of the Nigerian government

and building on the recommendations of the European Union Election Observation Mission from the 2015 General Elections and of the expert Identification and formulation mission to Nigeria that took place just recently.

These recommendation include

- the timely adoption of amendments to the electoral act
- the robust training of stakeholders
- a strong collation and transmission system
- better internal party democracy
- promotion of womens participation
- Securing an a-political and neutral role of security forces
- Main political actors to commit to an accord of minimum guarantees ahead of the elections.
- more transparency in funding of political parties (may I pause here and commend the government for putting the fight against corruption on the top of the agenda and stressing that if such an effort must be successful it need to start with the political system itself and reverse the negative spiral of impunity)

So there is plenty to do both ahead, during and after the upcoming elections, which is why the support we launch today has a five year span reaching far beyond the next big election.

And to ensure the success we have identified 10 implementing partners to lead on the implementation of this project, with majority of them being local partners.

They include - European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES), Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC), Youth Initiative for Advocacy Growth and Advancement (YIAGA), Nigerian Institute of Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), Institute of Media and Society (IMS), International Press Centre (IPC), BBC Media Action, Albino Foundation, Cleen Foundation and the Westminster Foundation For Democracy.

Ahead of the 2019 general elections, Nigeria is at a pivotal moment that allows the country to take important steps to improve its electoral process. The European Union will continue its partnership with the Government in the on-going electoral reform process with a view to enhancing the quality and participation of all Nigerians in this very important process.

We are particularly keen to see increased participation of women, youth and vulnerable groups in this process, and are committed to providing support in this regard. But we also

look to our Nigerian partners to give more priority to this important issue.

I cannot think of a place I have been with stronger women or more dynamic youth. Not including more these groups is overlooking huge opportunities!

But above all we hope for a democratic culture where focus is less on how to get to power and more on what the power should be used for in terms of providing political solutions and services to all Nigerians.

...in other words a rights-based approach where the citizen is always the centre of gravity.

In concluding, I wish to thank INEC, the Ministry of Budget and Planning, Members of the National Assembly, political parties and all stakeholders present for taking time out to be part of this very important event.

Thank your colleagues and members of the diplomatic community and all stakeholders present

I am sure that if we all pull in the same direction we will be able to turn this project into a vital contribution to continued consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. **Thank You very much!**