

**INTERNATIONAL PRESS CONFERENCE BY FOREIGN OBSERVERS,  
DOMESTIC AND CIVIL SOCIETIES ORGANIZATION ON RIVERS STATE  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY RE-RUN ELECTION, 2016**

All Protocol observed.

The Rivers State Re-Run elections for 3 senatorial seats, 12 seats of the House of Representatives and 22 House of Assembly seats were held on Saturday the 19<sup>th</sup> of March, 2016 across the state.

The brief summary of our reports are as follows:

**1. POOR SENSITIZATION OF VOTERS:**

There was general apathy. In Etche Local Government Area some women were seen going to their farm and they expressed surprise that there was election on that day after the Governor had won his case.

**2. LESS NUMBER OF ACCREDITED OBSERVERS:**

INEC accredited only 10 observer group for the election and only 7 were in the field. This is against what 46 observer group approved for FCT Abuja elections.

**3. HIJACKING OF MATERIALS:**

There were cases of hijacking of materials which was mainly done with the aide of Soldiers, some instance are:

- In Okirika LGA 21 polling units in ward 6 had their materials hijacked and escorted by military gun boats to the sea where same was filled and returned, but the INEC officials cancelled the result.
- In Etche the materials for ward 1, 11 and 13 were hijacked and loaded in Military vehicles to unknown destination and results brought for collation which led to the cancellation of the election in the LGA.
- In Ikwerre ward 7 over 50 soldiers and senior members of a political party brazenly and impiously hijacked the materials for election. The attempt to bring result for collation was assisted by the military but eventually failed.

- In Eleme LGA materials were hijacked in all wards with the aid of soldiers which led the cancellation of the election.

#### **4. ABDUCTION OF INEC OFFICIAL, INTIMIDATIONS, KIDNAPPING AND KILLINGS RECORDED**

There are recorded cases of abduction of INEC officials, intimidations, kidnapping and killings. Some instances are:

- In Port Harcourt ward 10, the Collation Officer was abducted by a political party with the result sheets. She was arrested by the Police and she confessed on camera to having been compelled to fill the result sheet. While she was in Police custody at Mile 1 station, members of a political party led by top government officials with retinue of soldiers stormed the Police Station to forcefully get the lady released unconditionally. However, the presence of the A.I.G in charge of the election in the State aborted their plan.
- In Khana, the Secretary to the State Government (SSG) who resisted the use of soldiers to hijack materials and the use of fake results sheets, was arrested by the Army and forced into an armored personnel carrier (APC). He was released the following day after the elections.
- In Buguma, Asari –Toru Local Government Area, a senior politician with the aid of thugs attempted to hijack materials but he was successfully resisted by the voters and in that incident, he shot and killed his Uncle and 3 other persons also died.
- In ward 8 Ikwerre Local Government Area, an agent of the PDP was shot dead by political thugs.
- In Ikwerre Local Government Area, senior politicians including candidates of a political party chased and hit the truck of the INEC Electoral Officer (E.O) of the Local Government Area, the E.O was feared dead and the commission withdrew its staff from the field. The E.O resurfaced after two days.
- The orderly of the Chief of Staff to the Governor was shot dead by security men attached to a senior politician.

- A pregnant woman was killed in Tai LGA by soldiers attached to a politician.
- In ward 7 (Ubima) of Ikwerre LGA, a very senior citizen with soldiers over 50 in number matched all the electoral material out of their units with the gun wielding soldiers escorting the pool officials to their programmed destination. This result was eventually not accepted.
- A member of NYSC was killed in Ahoada East by soldiers under the command of a politician as he refused to do their bidding to release election materials in his custody
- The screaming headlines of Rivers State being a theatre of war are highly exaggerated. However, the reality on ground is far better than the mirage created by the media. This scared some observers and it took voters boldness for us to be here.

## **5. DEPLOYMENT OF SOLDIERS**

The massive and condemnable deployment of soldiers for the election led to apprehension by the indigenes of the state and the soldiers aided in hijacking materials and intimidating voters.

The soldiers were acting on the instructions of politicians of a particular political party. This heightened the tension and embolden those working in concert with the soldiers to commit more havoc and intimidate voters.

In Tai 15 youths all of a political party were arrested by soldiers and made to lie on the ground facing the sun.

## **6. LATE ARRIVAL OF ELECTION MATERIALS:**

The late arrival of materials was occasion by the State wide protest by the PDP that some of the result sheets were not original and of such should not be used for the election. This was resolved by all Parties agreeing to authenticate the result sheets deplored to the field by the agents and E.O signing on same. In some other places, the Police did not arrive early to escort materials to the units.

## **7. BIASED AND SENSATIONAL REPORTING BY THE MEDIA:**

It was observed that some media exaggerated the matter and in fact distorted the facts. This was initially noticed amongst Media houses owned by politicians. Their reportage was mainly tilted in favour of the political party of their directors. A case in point is the report on the killing of the orderly of the Chief of Staff to the Governor. The report in most newspapers was that the Chief of Staff attempted to assassinate a Governorship candidate, whilst in reality it was the orderly of the Chief of Staff that was killed by security men attached to the Governorship candidate.

## **8. POLITICALLY BIASED AD-HOC STAFF:**

Most of the ad-hoc staff recruited appears to be members of a particular political party. This was protested by other political parties and copies of their protest were sent to us.

However, INEC did not take any step to redress the complaints and these caused distrust amongst other politicians. One such person sent to Omuma LGA almost caused a fracas as the people revolted.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. All the results of elections concluded at the units should be collated and announced on the basis of majority of lawful voters and avoid cases of inconclusiveness this being a re-run while in Local Government where election was cancelled should be slated at the shortest possible time to avoid prolonged tension and allow the society to progress.
2. The government of Nigeria should strongly advise the Nigerian Army to stay away from polling boots and collation centers during election exercise as this is against acceptable standards and endangers lives rather than secure same. It is even worse when the army is put in the hand of politicians and they take instructions from them.
3. INEC to screen officials for election exercise to be men and women of credibility not sympathizers of politicians or political parties and allegation of bias against any staff should be taken seriously.
4. INEC to form a synergy with the security agencies to distribute materials to polling units together on the election day and on time.
5. Ad-hoc staff that are less than 30 years should not be deployed for election duties as they cannot take decisions.

6. Ad-hoc staff should be given adequate security during elections.
7. The media should avoid sensational and exaggerated stories in their reporting and do more of balanced and investigative journalism in line with etiquettes of the profession.
8. Politicians should not get security forces involved in politics.
9. The perpetrators of crimes during the elections be charged to court to deter similar actions in the future.
10. INEC performance could be better with less interference and interest by some of its staff particularly very senior officers.

### **COMMENDATIONS:**

1. We commend The Nigerian Police for the massive deployment of Policemen for the re-run and insistence that proper elections be conducted against the biased position of the Nigerian Army but more efforts should be made at subsequent elections. The Police performed excellently well, save few units where they arrived late.
2. We commend the Party agents for their good conduct during election at most polling units across the state. This is an improvement on the past.
3. We commend the improved enlightenment and resolve of the electorates who remained resolute and dogged in following up of their results to ensure that their votes were counted.
4. We commend the NYSC and youth corps members who selflessly and boldly rendered services to the nation and sympathize with corps member who lost her life.

### **Observers Groups Present at the Press Conference**

1. West African Network of Election Observers, Herbert General Lordmator
2. Justice and Equity Organisation, Mr. B. Bafunsho
3. Civil Society Network, Head, Emma Nweke
4. National Association of State Legislators
5. African Initiative for Sustainable and Positive Development
6. Restoration for Truth and Right Initiative, Chief Adolphus
7. WANEO, Rivers State Coordinator, Ambassador C. Onutemeka