

**CATHOLIC CARITAS FOUNDATION OF NIGERIA**

**2023 General Elections Situation Room**

***Post National Elections Interim Press Statement Issued by the Caritas Nigeria/JDPC***

***Situation Room at 02.30 pm, 27<sup>th</sup> of February, 2023***

**Gentlemen of the Press, good afternoon!**

**a. Introductory Brief and Mandate**

As a faith-based organization, we have observed with keen interest and utmost resolve to ensure free, fair, credible, secure, and inclusive elections in 2023. We have done this with generous approval from the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria {CBCN}, and INEC that accredited 6000 observers for our Organization and who have sent in reports across the 36 states of the federation including the FCT, within the last 96 hours. These 6000 accredited observers in addition to over 10000 other citizen observers have sent in structured report detailing trends of logistics preparation, deployment of sensitive and non-sensitive materials; the use of BIVAS for voter accreditation, verification and actual voting; the subsequent electronic transmission of results and other electoral behaviour displayed at the polls. Our position primarily summarizes outcomes of all of these at the Polling Units and Ward Collation Centers.

While full details of our report will be disseminated shortly, we present the following statement which officially articulates our impression of the entire electioneering process as follows:

**b. Arrival of Materials and INEC Officials**

It is with deep regret that we announce our total disappointment with the snail-pace deployment of sensitive and non-sensitive materials in more than 50% of the 176,606 polling units across the country. It is not only disheartening to imagine that after the declaration of curfew before the election

and the accompanying empty roads and streets, INEC officials and security personnel were unable to reach more than 60% of the Polling Units nationwide before 12pm. While this happened, excuses from the INEC have been puerile and unjustified; with paucity of proactiveness on the part of the National Commissioners responsible logistics and voter education.

As we noted in our earlier Press Briefing, there are reports signaling sabotage and crass complicity as some state officials made the arrival of materials difficult in order to gain political advantage for their parties. The destruction of the roads leading to some opposition strongholds in Kogi State not only amounts to subliminal crime of some sort but must be treated as an economic sabotage of the highest proportion designed to derail the electoral process. In the FCT, we noted in utter amazement, the poor deployment of materials to Polling Units whose distance is not more than 5 kilometers from the FCT Commission Office. This is unsatisfactory, coming from an INEC.

**c. Accreditation and Verifications of Voters**

In itself, the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BIVAS) is good. Having worked in some countries and in the recently conducted off-cycle Gubernatorial elections in Ekiti, Osun, and Anambra, indeed it is a very good innovation and its introduction to our voter authentication is great. However, the unprecedented and evil manipulation of the system in more than 30% of the Polling Units indicate a systematic ploy by INEC to compromise the precedents set by well-meaning Nigerians through the struggles and tussles that led to the passage into law of the 2022 Electoral Act. Otherwise, how do we explain, for instance, the deployment of one BIVAS machine in polling units having more than 2000 voters who had waited for more than 5 hours in long queues without the sight of INEC officials? It is even appallingly awful to receive complaints from Presiding Officers who insisted that they were given wrong codes and uncharged batteries for the BIVAS machines in most rural areas observed. In addition to the above, how on earth can we explain the snatching of the BIVAS in some Polling Units

under the watch of Policemen and other security personnel and threats of death issued to Presiding Officers and agents who dare question the thugs?

With about 4 years preparation for the 2023 General Elections, no justifiable reason can help placate the impact of this malfunctioning of the BIVAS. The idea of the usage of the BIVAS machine for this particular election is not only embarrassing, but an insult to the sensibility of Nigerians who waited under the rain and sunshine and still got disenfranchised because of the colossal incapacity to use the BIVAS rightly.

#### **d. Voting**

There is no gainsaying the fact that a great deal of Nigerians was disenfranchised arising from the malfunctioning of the BIVAS, sheer political thuggery, and daylight disruptions of the voting processes. While this held sway, our particular displeasure rest on how INEC officials colluded with Policemen and some State authorities to massively thumbprint ballot papers unhindered (in Lugbe Abuja, Apapa Lagos, Obior/Akpo Rivers, and in some parts of Katsina, Kano, and Gombe States). In some instances, sensitive and non-sensitive materials were burnt by thugs; voters and observers were beaten to stupor in the full glare of security personnel who not only watched these happen, but participated in the charade in some Polling Units in Lagos, FCT, Delta, and Rivers States. Additionally, cases of underage voting were noted in most parts of Gombe, Kano, and Katsina States under the handling of trained INEC officials. The alleged killing of Presiding Officers in Edo and Rivers because of refusal to compromise the integrity of the process reflect an untold story of how not to conduct General Elections under the watch of supposedly “sane” Professors and State Governors. Again, in this modern times and age, how can one successfully explain network glitches as reasons for the inability to have a seamless transmission of election results within 72 hours after voting? The jamming of the network by the ICT unit of the INEC National Office indicate utter

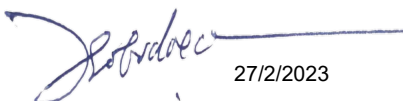
ignorance and incompetence assuming we want to undermine other reasons such as collusion and complicity. To say the least, while some Polling Units experienced relatively peaceful voting process, the odious happening in the places noted above leave indelible marks in our pursuit for democratic elections.

**e. Concluding Remarks**

We encourage and commend the patriotism and resilience of Nigerians to achieve a peaceful conduct of the General Elections so far. We also want to strongly advice that this is maintained and that the high-spirit should not be dampened by naysayers. As we remarked three days ago while launching our Situation Room, we also re-affirm once more that the INEC has a responsibility to organize and deliver a free, fair, credible, secure, and inclusive election. While the hope and trust that Nigerians have on them is arguably dashed, we cannot but state, most unequivocally, that things are beginning to fall apart. This is not the path we have desired having risen from the shattering wreckages done by the Military rulership before 1999. Arising from this, therefore, we recommend with immediate effect, that ballot audit, fresh conduct of elections in areas where overwhelming violence took the day, and the seamless overhauling of most of the Commissioners of the INEC must happen to avert civil disobedience. We urge our fellow Nigerians not to be discouraged but wait patiently for the full results of the pool and go out for the next round of the elections come 11<sup>th</sup> March 2023.

Thank you and God bless!

Signed:



27/2/2023

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