

22 FEBRUARY 2023

GELEGELE DECLARATION ON 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS

A Call for Non-violent, peaceful polls devoid of Vote-buying

We, members of Civil Society Organisations converged on Gelegele, Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State, today, Wednesday 22 February 2023 over the forthcoming General elections in Nigeria. The meeting was convened by Ijaw Youth Leaders Forum(IYLF) with support from the Office of the Wife of Edo State Governor and African Network for Environment and Economic Justice (ANEEJ).

Over 200 participants attended the conference and were drawn from Grassroots Organisations, Pro-Democracy Organisations, Human Rights Groups, Academia, Feminist Organisations, Artisanal groups, and Persons Living With Disabilities (PLWDs).

General Observations

We note the level of preparations for the 2023 general elections thus far by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and we are satisfied with arrangements in line with the amended Electoral Act 2022. We do hope that the logistics arrangements would not be affected by the current Naira scarcity and hic-cups in the delivery chain of petroleum petrol.

We further note that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has improved its system through the Bimodal Voters' Accreditation System (BVAS), which should curb electoral malfeasance, such as vote-buying and vote-trading.

We observe that Nigerians are well confident about the BVAS as we all hope and expect that it will engender transparency in electoral process.

We decry the threat to the elections by some outlawed organisations in parts of the country who have threatened to unleash mayhem during the elections, specifically, the IPOB, Boko-Haram and ISWAP members should reconsider their stance and allow peaceful polls across the country.

We note that for over 20 years of sustaining democracy, Nigeria needs to work towards achieving inclusive governance where all classes of citizens and underserved groups have every opportunity to participate in governance processes effectively.

DECLARATION

In the light of the foregoing, we wish to make the following declarations hereinafter referred to as the **Gelegele Declaration on the 2023 General Elections**, the participants at the conference wish to:

1. Demand zero tolerance to electoral violence from all political parties and their agents as well as voters. We call on all politicians and supporters of various candidates to ensure peaceful polls and eschew any form violence, voter intimidation and harassment, particularly the opposition parties in the various states throughout the days of elections and after the elections.

2. Demand zero tolerance to vote-buying by candidates for the 2023 general elections and their supporters and call on them to refrain from all acts of vote-buying or vote-trading in any form whatsoever as vote-buying is capable of undermining the credibility of the electoral process.

3. Demand that all those involved in violence and election violence should be promptly arrested and prosecuted to serve as deterrence to others.

4. Urge the United States of America, United Kingdom, Canada and European Union Countries' Governments to sanction any individual or political party involved in vote-buying or election violence. They should be placed on their watch list and denied visas/entry into their countries.

5. Call on security agents to provide top notch security across the country to ensure that no form of violence is allowed to fester in any part of the country, particularly in flash points where insurgents have threatened to unleash mayhem. Again, security agents deployed for the elections should promptly arrest anyone or group of persons found sharing money at polling stations or other designated election materials sharing centres and venues. Security agents must be professional in the discharge of their election duties and must shun any form of inducements or act of corruption.

6. Urge registered voters to adequately use their PVCs in the forthcoming elections as we believe that the election would change the story of the country for better once all eligible voter are allowed to freely exercise their franchise.

7. Call on the International and Local Election Observers to ensure prompt sharing of information regarding their observation with INEC and Security agencies to help improve every stage of the electoral process.

SIGNED

For and on behalf of all participating organizations, concerned citizens and other CSOs who subscribe to non-violent elections in Nigeria.

1. Comrade Joseph Gbale, President, Ijaw Youth Leaders Forum (IYLF).
2. Rev David Ugolor, Executive Director, Africa Network for Environment and Economic Justice