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Statement on the Sokoto Gubernatorial Election – Held 18 February 2012

Delivered at Sheraton Hotel, Abuja on 20 Feb 2012

Summary

Ladies and gentlemen of the press, on behalf of the National Steering Committee (NSC) of Project Swift Count, it is our pleasure to welcome you to this press conference to report on our observation findings for the February 18, 2012, Sokoto gubernatorial election.

As you already know, Project Swift Count is jointly carried out by the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN), Justice Development and Peace/Caritas (JDPC), the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) and Transition Monitoring Group (TMG). Thus reflecting the rich diversity of Nigeria, it brings together Christians and Muslims, as well as organizations with citizen election observation and legal expertise.

For the Sokoto gubernatorial election, Project Swift Count deployed 627 observers across all 23 Local Government Areas (LGAs) — 600 stationary observers at 300 polling units and 27 mobile observers.

The polling units to which stationary observers were deployed were carefully selected as a random, representative sample of all 3,035 polling units across Sokoto; therefore, PSC is able to conclude, with 95%

certainty within a margin of error of 3%, that its qualitative observations about the electoral process and its quantitative estimates of the election results reflect the process and results from all 3,035 polling units in Sokoto, not merely at the polling units observed.

Our findings today address the processes of accreditation of voters, the voting and counting at polling units, and the verification of the Sokoto gubernatorial election results as announced by the Independent National Election Commission (INEC).

Project Swift Count finds generally that the process provided the people of Sokoto with a meaningful opportunity to exercise their right to vote and that the official results as announced by INEC accurately reflect the ballots cast at polling units. The conduct of this election was markedly improved from Bayelsa, but problems remain with late arrival of polling staff and materials; voters not remaining at polling units during accreditation (opening the possibility for multiple voting); and cases of intimidation. These concerns, however, did not occur at levels and rates that would substantially undermine the overall credibility of the process or of the results announced by INEC.

Project Swift Count again encourages INEC to address these issues as feasible for the Cross River Gubernatorial election to be held on Saturday February, 25, 2012.

Methodology

The primary objective of Project Swift Count is to help promote free, fair, peaceful, credible, and legitimate elections in Nigeria that are conducted in accordance with international and regional standards as well as the laws and the constitution of our country and the “Declaration of Global Principles for Nonpartisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organisations”.

The Swift Count methodology provides voters, political contestants and electoral authorities with an accurate, real-time picture of the conduct of the accreditation of voters, voting, and counting. This serves as a deterrent to anyone tempted to manipulate the process. Project Swift Count will also be able to provide voters and political contestants greater confidence that the official results accurately reflect the ballots cast.

Swift Count uses samples of polling units for each election that have been carefully selected by trained Nigerian statisticians, using time-tested statistical principles to ensure that they are both representative and unbiased. This methodology, when matched with the latest technology—text messages transmitted by cell phones to a central data base—enables Project Swift Count to present an objective, nonpartisan, real-time picture of the conduct of the election and to verify the accuracy of the official results.

As PSC has noted previously, INEC did not make available to PSC the voter register for individual polling units for Bayelsa, nor has it done so for Sokoto or Cross River. Instead, PSC can only obtain the number of persons registered to vote at the polling units as it is announced by the electoral officers at each polling unit. Because the percentage of voter turnout is calculated by dividing the number of voters casting ballots at a polling unit by the total number of persons eligible to vote at that polling unit, PSC cannot reliably and independently verify the voter turnout percentage without having access to the official voter registers for the polling units. PSC renews its call to INEC to release the voter register lists for individual polling units to improve transparency in the electoral process.

Despite the challenges that prevent an independent and reliable verification of voter turnout percentage, PSC is able to estimate—with 95% confidence—the total number of votes actually cast for each candidate at the 3,035 polling units

across Sokoto. Thus, PSC can independently verify the election results as announced by INEC.

Findings

Opening of Polling Units

INEC continues to suffer logistical challenges, as evidenced by the delayed deployment of polling officials and election materials to some polling units. As of 7:30 am, at 57% the polling units across Sokoto, polling officials and election materials had **not yet** arrived at the polling unit. This is an improvement over Bayelsa last weekend where polling officials and election materials had not yet arrived by 7:30 am. at 68% of polling units. Encouragingly for Sokoto, no polling units failed to open altogether, while in Bayelsa, 9% of polling units never opened at all.

Accreditation of Voters

- Accreditation of voters had started at 73% of polling units by 9:00 am and at virtually all by noon (99%). Again, this contrast sharply with Bayelsa where only 32% of polling units were reported open by 9:00 am.
- Across all polling units, there were on average 3 polling officials and 3.5 political party polling agents present at polling units.
- There were security personnel at 84% the polling units.
- At 81% of polling units, no one was accredited to vote who did not have a voter's card, while at an additional 17% of polling units, only a few people were accredited who did not have voter's card.
- At 67% of polling units, no one was turned away because their name was not found on the register of voters, but of some concern, 29% of polling units had a few people not being able to find their names on the register of voters—suggesting the register of voters is becoming outdated.

- Voters' names were ticked in the register of voters at virtually all polling units (94%), and voters had their cuticles marked with indelible ink at 90% of polling units.

Of concern during accreditation of voters:

- Everyone or nearly everyone remained at their assigned polling unit after being accredited at 65% of polling units; however, at 31% of the polling units, most people left their assigned polling unit after being accredited. This problem was most acute in Gudu (42%), Kebbe (42%) and Sokoto South (50%) LGAs and was similar to the situation Bayelsa where at 25% of polling units most voters left after being accredited.
- There were incidents of harassment or intimidation at 11% of polling units during the accreditation process—with this problem most frequent in Bodinga, Kebbe, Silame and Sokoto North LGAs.

Voting

- Voting had commenced by 2:00 pm at 91% of polling units.
- At 98% of polling units, the ballot box was shown to be empty before being closed and locked.
- At 91% of polling units, voters were able to mark their ballots in secret.
- At virtually all polling stations, all voters showed voters cards when voting (87%); all voters' names were checked in the register of voters (94%); all ballot papers were stamped and signed (98%); and all voters' cuticles were marked with indelible ink (89%).

Of concern during voting:

- In Sokoto, 10% of polling stations accredited new voters after voting had started. This problem was worst in Shagari (33%) and Tureta (29%) LGAs. It is down from Bayelsa, where 16% of polling units permitted accreditation of new

voters during voting, but still more than during the general elections (5%).

- Incidents of harassment or intimidation during the voting process occurred at 14% of the polling units. This problem was more prevalent in Bodinga, Kebbe, Silame and Sokoto North LGAs

Counting

- Ballot papers were properly sorted and counted at 98% of polling units.
- At 91% of polling units, the official results were publicly posted.

Of concern during counting:

- At 12% of polling units, some political party agents present disagreed with the results as announced by the polling officials. This issue was most problematic in Illela, Isa, Rabah and Wurno LGAs, where some political party agents disagreed with the announced results at a quarter of the polling units. While this is of concern, it did not substantially affect the outcome of the election, given the large margin of victory in the election.
- Acts of intimidation during the counting process occurred at 9% of the polling units, with the problem most severe in Kebbe, Sokoto South and Yabo LGAs.

Turnout and Rejected Ballots

The estimated turnout for the Sokoto gubernatorial election is 29.9%, with a margin of error of 2.8%. INEC had not announced official voter turnout by the time this Statement was released. This is similar to the turnout for Adamawa (37.5%) and Kogi (35.1%), but it is in sharp contrast to Bayelsa, where the turnout was (71.4%). Turnout for Bayelsa was particularly suspicious due to the large number of polling stations (25%) where the

official turnout was 95% or greater. In contrast for Sokoto, only 3% of polling units reported turnout over 95%.

Rejected ballots (meaning those for which the voter's intent could not be clearly determined and hence were not counted) were very high (6.4%). This mean roughly one in every fifteen voters who went to the polls and voted their vote did not count because their intent could not be determined.

Verification of Official Results

Using a random, representative sample that included reports from 300 polling units, the results estimated by Project Swift Count are consistent with the results announced by INEC. Our observers collected official results as they were announced and posted at the polling unit by INEC.

Table 1: Project Swift Count Sokoto Gubernatorial Election*				
Political Party	PSC Estimates (%)	Margin of Error (at 95% level of confidence)	PSC Estimated Range (%)	INEC Announced Results (%)
ANPP	18.9%	2.8%	16.1% – 21.7%	18.0%
PDP	73.4%	2.8%	70.6% – 76.2%	71.18%
Remaining 28 parties	7.6%	2.8%	4.8% – 10.4%	10.82%

*Results as announced by INEC on February 20, 2012.

The order and magnitude of the INEC results for each of these parties is the same as the Swift Count estimates. Because Project Swift Count was able to independently collect official results from polling units and arrive at the same results as INEC, political contestants and the public alike should have a

high degree of confidence that the official results as announced by INEC reflect the votes cast in the Sokoto gubernatorial election.

Critical Incidents

Critical incidents are electoral irregularities, whether intentional or inadvertent, that could undermine the integrity of the overall process if they were to occur at significant levels and rates.

The most frequently reported incidents were:

- intimidation and harassment
- late arrival of election materials
- accreditation of voters after voting has commenced
- violence
- vote buying
- underage voting

The less frequently reported incidents included:

- simultaneous voting and accreditation
- illegal voting
- stealing of ballot papers
- suspension of voting
- campaigning and campaign materials in or near polling units
- ballot box stuffing/snatching

While these incidents are serious and must be addressed by INEC, they did not occur at levels and rates that would substantially undermine the integrity of the overall electoral process or the results of the Sokoto gubernatorial election held 18 February 2012, due to the large margin between the contestants.

Recommendations

- INEC has significantly improved its observer accreditation process and it should continue this positive trend.
- INEC is to be commended for opening 43% of the polling units on time, which is similar to 42% for the April 2011 general elections and significantly better than the 33.8% in Bayelsa and 38% in Adamawa. INEC should continue this improvement during the upcoming Cross River gubernatorial election.
- Voter turnout was estimated at 30.1%. This is below the turnout rates for Kogi (35.1%) and Adamawa (37.5%). Bayelsa remains the aberration at 71.4%, which PSC noted was not a credible figure. Low voter turnout remains an impediment to deepening the democratic process in Nigeria. More efforts should be made by INEC and civil society organizations to educate voters on the importance of participating in the electoral process.
- Intimidation and harassment of voters and polling officials continues to occur at significant levels. More effort needs to be made by governments, INEC, and civil society to educate communities on the importance of credible elections, and the necessity of citizen observation.
- The security personnel failed to deploy to 16% of the polling units, which may have contributed to the unacceptably high levels of intimidation, harassment, and violence experienced during the election. Security agencies and forces should deploy to all polling units and should continue to support their personnel with additional training and education in advance of future electoral exercises.
- Sokoto experienced an unusually high rate of rejected ballots (6.4%), which may indicate the need for greater

voter education. The compressed election schedule limited the time available to conduct such voter education activities in Sokoto.

- At 29% of the polling stations, a few persons with voters cards were denied accreditation because their names were not found on the voters registration list. This may be due in part to the decision earlier in the week that newly registered voters would not be accredited due to inadequate period of posting notice in advance of the election. INEC should ensure that the voters register accurately reflects those who have registered to vote.
- People leaving the polling unit after they have been accredited remains a significant problem. In Sokoto, 65% of the polling units reported none or only a few people left after being accredited; however, 31% of the polling units reported that more than half of the people left after accreditation. Allowing people to leave the polling unit after accreditation opens the possibility of multiple voting, and INEC should address this concern for the election in Cross River.
- It was anecdotally observed that the voters' names in the register were not in any order, neither alphabetically nor numerically. INEC should ensure some form of order to achieve efficiency and reduce the burden on voters.
- Secrecy of the ballot continued to be a challenge during the Sokoto election, violating a fundamental dimension of democratic elections. In Sokoto, 8.9% of polling units failed to provide secrecy of the ballot for voters. INEC should continue to review the processes in place to allow voters to cast ballots with their choice free from scrutiny. INEC should provide cubicles for voter to achieve the required secrecy.

- There is an urgent need for political parties and contestants to show maturity and respect for the voting process so as to forestall nefarious practices such as ballot box snatching, vote buying, bribing of security agencies and sponsoring of political thugs.

Project Swift Count will continue to observe the electoral process and will deploy observers for the Gubernatorial Election in Cross River next Saturday on February 25, 2012.

God Bless Nigeria



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Learn more about Project 2011 Swift Count at www.pscnigeria.org