

PROJECT 2011 SWIFTCOUNT



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Interim Statement on the National Assembly Elections Sunday April 10, 2011

Delivered at the Sheraton Hotel, Abuja

Summary

Ladies and gentlemen of the press, on behalf of the National Steering Committee (NSC) of Project 2011 Swift Count, it is our pleasure to welcome you to this press conference to report on our initial observations concerning yesterday's National Assembly elections.

Let me state up front, on behalf of all of the partner organisations, we condemn the bombing of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) office in Suleja, Niger state on Friday as well as the bombing in Borno and other incidents of violence that occurred in different parts of Nigeria on election day. We call on all Nigerians to reject violence and work together for peaceful elections as we commiserate with the families of the deceased.

As you already know, Project 2011 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.

Based on the information of our 762 observers, who reported from 741 local government areas where elections were held yesterday, Project 2011 Swift Count finds that while the election was not perfect, it provided a meaningful opportunity for Nigerians to exercise their right to vote.

Despite the bombings and the delays in the elections, Nigerians who went to the polls did so enthusiastically. Project 2011 Swift Count commends Nigerians for their resilience and commitment to the democratic process. We also recognize the dedication of the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) members who served as polling officials despite the many challenges they faced and turned out in mass to perform their national duty.

The Presidential election and State elections will be held on April 16 and 26 respectively. While progress has been made by INEC, logistical problems continue to plague the election administration. Further improvements must be made so that polling officials and voting materials arrive on time. Challenges with the register of voters remain, and INEC should continue to take steps to ensure that all registered voters are able to cast their ballots in the upcoming elections. Yesterday, we were fortunate that incidents of violence and electoral malfeasance were not widespread and did not spiral out of control. The efforts of the security forces to support the process are commendable. But, they must do even more to ensure a secure environment for polling.

Methodology

The primary objective of Project 2011 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 2011 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 2011 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.

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, 28% of observers reported that polling officials and election materials had arrived at the polling unit – compared with only 13% last Saturday. However, 72% of observers still reported that polling officials and election materials had not arrived as of 7:30 am. The fewest problems were in North West where observers reported 52% of polling units as having polling officials and materials by 7:30 am while in South East only 5% had polling officials and materials.

Accreditation of Voters

Accreditation of voters generally went smoothly. However, there were polling units where accreditation of voters and voting were conducted simultaneously contrary to INEC procedures. There were also incidents where individuals with voter’s cards were not accredited to vote because their names were missing from the register of voters.

- Project 2011 Swift Count observers reported that accreditation of voters had started at 58% of polling units by 9:00 am and that 96% had opened by noon. Voting started latest in the South East and South South geopolitical zones where 82% and 71% of polling units opened after 9 am.
- At 67% of polling units there were 3 polling officials present (a notable increase from the voter registration exercise when most centres had only two officials).
- On average our observers reported that there were four political party polling agents at each polling unit.
- 96% of our observers reported that there were security personnel at the polling unit.
- 92% of our observers reported no one was accredited to vote who did not have a voter’s card.
- 95% of our observers reported that voters’ names were ticked in the register of voters when being accredited.

- 28% of our observers reported that more than half of the accredited voters left the polling unit after being accredited.
- Only 7% of our observers reported any incidents of harassment or intimidation at polling units.

Voting

The voting procedures were generally followed, although there were polling units where people were accredited to vote after voting started.

- Project 2011 Swift Count observers reported that voting began before 1:00 pm in 58% of polling units and by 3:00 pm voting had commenced at 96% of polling units.
- At 94% of polling units our observers reported the ballot box was shown to be empty before being closed and locked.
- 96% of our observers reported that no one was permitted to vote without a voter's card
- 96% of our observers reported that every ballot paper was stamped and signed before being given to voters.
- At 95% of polling units observers reported that voters were able to mark their ballots in secret.
- 11% of our observers reported that people were accredited to vote after accreditation closed. This was witnessed most frequently by observers in South South where they reported this issue at 21% of polling units.
- 8% of our observers reported incidents of harassment or intimidation during the voting process.

Counting

Few problems were reported with the counting process, but of serious concern is the fact that at 1 in 5 polling units the official results were not posted.

- Project 2011 Swift Count observers reported that the ballot papers were properly sorted and counted at 98% of polling units.
- At 92% of polling units our observers reported that all political party agents present agreed with the results as announced by the polling officials
- However, at 20% of polling units our observers reported that the official results were not posted for the public to see.

Critical Incidents

A total of 201 critical incident reports were received from the 148 mobile observers. These critical incidents were relatively evenly distributed across the six geopolitical zones. While these incidents are serious and must be addressed they do not fundamentally undermine the integrity of the process.

- The most frequently reported incidents related to the late arrival of materials.
- There were isolated reports of intimidation, violence, ballot box snatching, underage voting, vote buying and the suspension of voting.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Nigerians must still elect their President, Governors and Members of their State Houses of Assembly despite all of the challenges and attempts to disrupt the process. Efforts must be

redoubled to ensure that these elections are consistent with international and regional standards as well as the constitution and laws of Nigeria.

To INEC we recommend:

- INEC should continue to address the logistical problems that consistently undermined the electoral process – in particular the delivery of election materials.
- INEC should ensure that all registered voters are able to exercise their right to vote on election day – in particular those who have voter's cards.
- INEC should ensure that the official results at all polling units are posted for the public to see.

To Political Parties we recommend:

- Political parties should take all steps to ensure that their members and supporters adhere to the Political Party Code of Conduct signed by all political parties.
- Political parties should publicly condemn any act of intimidation, vote buying, underage voting or any other electoral malpractice by any of their members or supporters.

To the Security Forces we recommend:

- The security forces should ensure that there is sufficient security presence at all urban as well as rural polling units and that all security personnel carry out their duties in a non-partisan manner.

Most importantly to the people of Nigeria, Project 2011 Swift Count again commends you on your determination to exercise your right to vote. We urge Nigerians to go out and vote on April 16 for the Presidential election and on April 26 for the State elections.

Project 2011 Swift Count will continue to observe the entire process. For the Presidential election we will deploy more than 7,000 stationary observers at polling units in every state and every local government area of the country and nearly 1,000 mobile observers. Stationary observers will be deployed to a representative random sample of polling units and will transmit their findings in real time to our National Information Centre (NIC) using coded text messages. This will enable Project 2011 Swift Count to provide real-time, systematic nationwide information on the conduct of the Presidential Election and to verify the accuracy of the official result as announced by INEC.

God Bless Nigeria



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