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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
April 28, 2011

Observers Report Despite Intimidation and Harassment

Project 2011 Swift Count, a nonpartisan effort by four groups representing the rich diversity of Nigerian society, reported today that, the number of incidents recorded by its observers exceeded what were recorded during the presidential election.

While observer harassment was expected to diminish during this election, it actually increased. Political party agents, local government chairmen, political thugs, and community members intimidated and chased out Project 2011 Swift Count's observers from several polling units and in some cases even pummelled and kidnapped the observers.

In an Interim Statement, Project Swift Count's National Steering Committee (NSC) said "it is particularly alarming that INEC and the security forces did not take heed of its previous recommendation to take all necessary steps to ensure accredited observers have free access to polling units."

"We also strongly condemn leaders of local communities, in particular local government chairmen, who have taken the law into their hands by depriving citizen groups, accredited by INEC, of their mandate to observe the elections," stated DafeAkpedeye (SAN), Project 2011 Swift Count 1st Co-Chair. "We urge the appropriate authorities, in particular the security agencies, to swiftly bring to justice any culprit found compromising the integrity of the elections."

MashoodErubami, 2nd Co-Chair stated, "this significant level of harassment closes the democratic space for citizens' engagement."

Highlights of the PSC findings include the following:

- Similar to its findings from the Presidential election, Project 2011 Swift Count accredited observers faced significant challenges in gaining access to the polls during the State elections. These challenges were, however, more pronounced than during the Presidential election.
- A total of 937 critical incident reports were received from its mobile observers deployed by Project 2011 Swift Count in all 34 states. This is an increase compared to 628 reports received during the Presidential election. The situation, particularly in Delta, Akwalbom, Imo and Rivers, pose a great threat to citizens' franchise. It sets a negative template against the backdrop of a popular desire for credible elections in those states.

- The reported critical incidents were concentrated in South South (more than 40%), and to some degree in South East (close to 20%). Delta had a total of 178 total incidents, with intimidation and harassment being the topmost; Akwa Ibom recorded 161 incidents, with violence being in the majority; while Imo had 76 incidents reported, with violence and intimidation leading the list.
- There was a slight decline in INEC's logistics compared to the Presidential election. As of 7:30 am, observers at 38% of polling units reported that officials were present and ready for the State elections as compared to 42% of polling units that were ready at the same time during the Presidential election.
- On average, observers reported the presence of 4 political party agents at polling units as compared to 3 political party agents during the Presidential election.
- Certain improvements in the election processes during the past 3 weeks were noted, particularly a decline in shortage of election materials at polling units and the bolstering of security around polling units.
- 12% of its observers reported incidents of harassment or intimidation during the voting process, which is slightly higher than the Presidential election.

Project 2011 Swift Count's Interim Statement is based on reports from a representative random sample of 1,373 polling units in 723 of the 774 local government areas. The polling units were chosen as representative of Nigeria, using established statistical principles.

The National Steering Committee commended the people of Nigeria on their determination to exercise the right to vote. According to the statement "while condemning the deplorable acts of harassment and intimidation, it urge INEC and security agencies to fulfil their mandate to protect and provide access to polls to accredited citizen observers in future elections," and "political parties should publicly condemn all acts of violence and any elections fraud, particularly In the days after the elections."

Project 2011 Swift Count is a joint initiative of the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN); Justice, Development and Peace/Caritas Nigeria (JDPC), Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), and Transition Monitoring Group (TMG). Reflecting the rich diversity of Nigeria, the project brings together civic organizations and religious groups (Christian and Muslim) to promote free, fair, peaceful, credible and legitimate elections through non-partisan, independent citizen observation.



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