INTERIM REPORT OF PALACE OF PRIESTS ASSEMBLY’S OBSERVATION OF THE 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS (PRESIDENTIAL AND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS)

FEBRUARY 25, 2023

Palace of Priests Assembly (PPA), one of the accredited observer organizations based in Abuja, in collaboration with its social arm, the Priests Peace and Justice Initiative (PPJ), is pleased to present the interim report of the Presidential and National Assembly elections held on February 25, 2023. Palace of Priests Assembly currently implements the Mobilising Christians Against Corruption Project, aka the SHUN Corruption Project, with the support of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. PPA engages Pentecostals through skill building, collaboration, and Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) to facilitate their involvement in politics and governance and the fight against corruption in Nigeria.

PPA deployed a total of 613 Pentecostals to serve as election observers in 25 states across the six geopolitical zones (Benue, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Ebonyi, Bauchi, Akwa-Ibom, Borno, Rivers, Nassarawa, Niger, Enugu, Adamawa, Ondo, Lagos, Taraba, Gombe, Kano, Kaduna, Plateau, Imo, Kogi, Oyo, Edo, Kwara, and the Federal Capital Territory). This is a synchronized summary of reports submitted by observers.

Voter Turnout

In most of the polling units visited across the 25 states and the FCT where PPA deployed observers, there was high voter turnout with young men and women, the aged, persons with disabilities (PWD), and nursing mothers expressing eagerness to cast their votes. Voter apathy was low compared with other elections in the past. In some polling units across the 25 states, voters were already gathered as early as 6:30 am.
INEC Logistics Arrangement

INEC logistics arrangement had mixed reactions from across the states where our observers were deployed. From the late arrival of INEC officials and late commencement of the accreditation and voting processes to the inadequacies in the number of BVAS in most of the polling units especially where there were a high number of voters, the logistics arrangements were generally poor. Kits and non-sensitive materials were properly arranged when the officials arrived but INEC officials and voting materials did not get to most of the polling units visited early. Reports across the 25 states indicated that the average time of arrival of INEC officials was about 10:30 am while the average time of commencement of voting was 11:15 am. Instances include:

- In Omoto/Urhie street polling unit, code 031, election materials were yet to arrive at 12:09 pm when our observer reported, and no security nor INEC officials were sighted.
- In Orogun Ward 1, unit 5, Delta state, voting materials arrived at 10:50 am. Accreditation of voters and voting started at 11:10 am.
- In PU 172 in Borno state, Maisandari Ward, the officials arrived at 12.15 pm.
- In Takum LGA, Taraba state Gahwetun ward, Henry Porter polling unit 002, INEC officials arrived at 11:50 am but the BVAS could not be configured and the INEC officials had to return to the INEC office.

At 1:46 pm, our observer at Epie III, ward 6, beside MTN mast, PU 024, INEC Road, Kpansia Yenagoa LGA, Bayelsa state, had not sighted any electoral official nor security personnel. The case was different in some locations such as Arabic school PU 014, Kwara Ilorin west, Oko – Erin PU 040, and Polo Park 2 PU 006 where INEC officials and materials arrived before 9.30 am. In Calabar municipality Ward 10, Polling unit 15, officials arrived at 8:11 am, while accreditation and voting commenced by 9:00 am.
The voter register was not pasted on the walls of most of the polling units observed when voters arrived early in the morning (some as early as 6:30 am) before the arrival of the INEC officials, and this caused some level of agitation.

**Accreditation and Voting**

Accreditation and voting were generally delayed, with a few exceptions. Set up was not concluded before 8.30 am as Polling Officials were not present at that time in 90% of the polling units visited across the 25 states. The electoral body had said that accreditation and voting would commence by 8:30 am but as noted above, most of the polling units were not open even at 9:30 am. The exercise was scheduled to end at 2:30 pm but everyone in the queue by this time was meant to be given the opportunity to vote, but some polling units in Nassarawa LGA of Nassarawa State had no INEC official present at 2:41 pm. In Taraba/Kona/Jalingo Jauro Gadi primary school PU 050, voting Commenced by 11:00 am while in polling unit 002 Garin Magami voting commenced by 10.30 am. In Makurdi Benue state, Wailomayo Polling Unit 002, voting commenced by 10:00 am, and in Alijo/Yandev ward PU 034, voting started at 11.55 am. Our observers in Imo State/Owerri West/Obinze Ward/Primary School, Azudo 1, PU 011 reported that voting started at 9:58 am. The case was however different in Mushin Papa Ajao Ward 09 Polling Unit Adetula/037 where our observer reported that INEC Officials arrived at 7.30 am and accreditation and voting started simultaneously at 8.30 am and ended at 2.30 pm while sorting and counting of votes ended at 4.20 pm. Also, in Ifako ward 02 - soluyi/ kosofe LGA of Lagos State, Polling unit 18 Akinwunmi Street, and PU 034, accreditation and voting commenced by 8:54 am.

However, in some polling units in Sunny Vale Estate and Garki Model Market, Abuja, our observers reported that the process for accreditation and voting was
not done simultaneously and did not follow the INEC guideline as the process was meant to be carried out simultaneously. Voters were accredited and asked to join another queue where a second stage of verification was carried out. Our observers also reported that voting did not take place at Itohan Girls Grammar School, Ward 6, Ikpoba-Okha LGA of Edo state due to the non-availability of materials and INEC officials.

Our observer in Ajah, Lagos State was injured while running for safety when armed men at about 1:40 pm disrupted the elections but more security agents were deployed to the area and elections resumed and were concluded peacefully thereafter. In Kosofe Kasunmu junction in Shangisha polling Unit 007, our observers reported that the election was peaceful from morning hours but things took a twist when the counting process began. Some party agents did not agree to the void votes and this led to the snatching and destruction of ballot boxes and the process was disrupted.

**Vote Buying**

Our observers did not report the physical buying of votes at the time of reporting. However, some observers in some polling units reported a few incidents where some party agents were seen collecting voters' phone numbers and account details. These were Girei LGA, Modire Ward 02-04-98-002, Njouro Buba-002 in Adamawa, Ikpoba Okha LGA, ward 6, PU 44 and at Goretti ward 6, PU 80 in Edo State. Also, our observers reported generally that Voters were not prevented from going into the voting cubicle with their phones.

**Security of the process**

The Nigeria Police Force had initially reported a massive deployment of their personnel to maintain law and order across the country, there was an average of 3 police officers in most of the polling units visited alongside other security agents while a good number of them were seen at the checkpoints within the
state capitals. Beyond this, as the voting processes progressed in some of the locations, armed men in security outfits moved from polling unit to polling unit ensuring law and order. Voters were reported to be conducting themselves peacefully.

**Functionality of the BVAS**

The BVAS in most of the polling units worked perfectly and without challenge. The INEC officials were knowledgeable in the operation of the BVAS and were able to manage the process. However, there were pockets of reports from across the states in a few polling units where the BVAS did not work perfectly. In Polling unit 18 Akinwunmi Street, Ifako PU 034 it was reported that the BVAS thumb verification did not work but the facials identification and verification were used. This was the situation in other polling units across the states where our observers reported.

**Challenges**

i. Splitting the polling units was a big challenge for many voters thereby presenting themselves at the wrong polling units. Observers reported that voters had difficulty in identifying their polling units despite the sensitization by INEC for voters to identify and know their polling units before the day of the elections. This led to the overcrowding of some of the polling units and delayed accreditation and voting exercise.

ii. Vote buying, although not generally reported, some party agents in pockets of locations were seen collecting account details and phone numbers of voters.

iii. Violence in some parts of the country: The major event that led to pockets of violence is the delay in uploading results at the end of the voting
exercise. This caused some level of agitation resulting in violence in some locations.

iv. Late arrivals of ad-hoc Staff and electoral materials.

Recommendations
INEC needs to urgently identify the logistical and other challenges that led to delays in the arrival of officials and commencement of voting reported in many states across the country before the next elections. Also, INEC should mandate their officials to paste the voters register in all polling units a day before the elections. There is a need for more sensitization of the electorate about how to locate their polling units before election day.

It is important that INEC implements its own commitments to making special/appropriate arrangements to support PWDs, depending on their disability type, to facilitate their full inclusion in the process.

The integrity of the February 25 2023 elections has been marred by the failure of INEC officials to upload the results on the IREV portal at the polling units as stipulated by the electoral act, 2022. We recommend that INEC ensures that the stated procedure is followed to the letter in the upcoming Governorship and Houses of Assembly elections.

Conclusion
Overall, voter turnout was impressive. INEC deserves commendation for making improvements over previous elections in certain areas, particularly in the deployment of technology (BVAS) and the observance of priority voting for PWDs, the aged, pregnant, and nursing mothers. Also, availability and the distribution of kits and non-sensitive materials were impressive.

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