

# FOUNDATION FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

Press Release

## Nigerians Cry Freedom!!

The Foundation for Good Governance in Nigeria (FGGN), which has been monitoring the Nigerian general elections, is utterly disappointed and dismayed with the conduct of the presidential/gubernatorial elections held on 19 April 2003.

The elections have been widely criticised by domestic and international observers as being marred by serious poll malpractices, including vote fraud, ballot-box stuffing, bribery, lack of ballot secrecy, disenfranchisement of voters, arrests of supporters of opposition parties and vote-tallying even from areas where no elections took place at all. Most observer groups have reported these serious cases of electoral fraud all across the country, apparently with the collusion of election officials and security personnel.

In their report, the 118 European Union (EU) observers stated: "The presidential and a number of (governorship) elections were marred by serious irregularities and fraud — in a certain number of states, minimum standards for democratic elections were not met." In particular, the EU observers witnessed and obtained evidence of widespread election fraud in 13 states of Nigeria.

Similarly, two reputable US-based observer groups, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI) have reported widespread cases of election irregularities. The IRI, headed by Ambassador Robert Perry and Dr. George Folsom, stated: "Most disturbing to IRI delegates were incidents of outright or attempted fraud in some states", and "these instances of electoral fraud impugned the integrity of both the April 12 and April 19 electoral process."

Moreover, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) has decried the widespread electoral fraud and faulted both the "four-tiered collation process of votes (which has proven to be vulnerable to manipulation and lapses in transparency) and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The NDI criticised INEC on the grounds that "it has not asserted itself to correct or take action against [reported] electoral inconsistencies and misconduct". The NDI added: "By refusing to comment on or clarify seemingly implausible election results in certain areas, especially in the South-South, and referring all enquiries to the courts, INEC undermines public confidence in the Commission's work and the electoral process as a whole."

In the same vein, the Nigeria-based observer groups, led by Transitional Monitoring Group (TMG), the

nation's umbrella monitoring body comprising 170 human rights and civil society organisations, had discredited the election results. More specifically, the election observers noted the following gross cases of election irregularities:

- Elections did not take place in several parts of the oil-rich South-South and South-East and yet election results were declared in favour of the ruling PDP.
- In several other locations where elections were held peacefully, especially in the North West, North East and North Central, results were altered in favour of the ruling PDP after counting had been done and certified.
- Polling officials in many centres stamped and gave bundles of ballot papers to agents of the ruling party. The agents then proceeded to thumbprint in the full glare of security personnel before stuffing them into the ballot boxes.
- Some thugs belonging to the ruling party brought in ballot papers already thumb-printed and mixed them up with genuine ballot papers during the counting process, thereby creating confusion and pandemonium. In some states, thugs armed with knives, daggers, guns, and cutlasses attacked polling centres and snatched ballot boxes.

These and many more cases of irregularities in some of the critical stages leading to the elections and compilation of results tended to undermine the credibility of the election process.

This is an election where a prisoner charged with the murder of the then serving Attorney General and Minister of Justice of the Federation, more than a year ago, won a senate election on the platform of the ruling party (PDP). Everything about this election defies logic, does not accommodate honesty and integrity, destroys sanity, wipes away hope for a better future for Nigerians and turns the right of the citizenry to freely elect their leaders to nothingness.

If Nigerians and the world over were in any doubt as to the reliability of reports by various international organisations, notably Transparency International, that the current Nigerian government is the most corrupt in the world, this blatant abuse of democratic tenets and crude abuse of human rights has undoubtedly laid that to rest.

Secretariat  
6 Lineker Close  
Castlefield, Stafford  
Staffordshire, ST16 1AL, UK

Tel: +44 1785 244 636 E-mail: arabodigil@fsmail.net

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For the last four years the electorates have been living in poverty, hunger, ethnic and religious violence, and insecurity of life, property, and honour and have witnessed corruption, looting of the treasury and acute economic depression despite high global oil prices during this period. Nigeria and Nigerians need to be rescued from these problems and to be given their human and constitutional rights to vote in a free and fair election.

Unfortunately, with the riot police and the military on full alert, Nigerians are not only raped, but also subdued and intimidated at a gunpoint to either play ball or dance the music. Nevertheless, Nigerians are known for their resilience especially where their rights are concerned. But all hands must be on deck, particularly in the international community, to support the aggrieved people of Nigeria in their quest for true democracy based on honesty, integrity, accountability, responsibility and transparency.

It is noteworthy that opposition parties and the electorate have long expressed grave concerns over the nature and composition of the election body. INEC, which is supposed to be an "independent" and "impartial" body, has all its members (from top to bottom) appointed by the government and most INEC officials are card-carrying members of the PDP (the ruling party). This clearly suggests that INEC is not an independent arbiter! It is therefore not surprising that the elections were massively rigged and grossly manipulated.

The Foundation for Good Governance in Nigeria (FGGN) unequivocally condemns such fraudulent acts and gross violation of the wishes of the electorate. The FGGN calls for the cancellation of the election results and urges all lovers of democracy and good governance in Nigeria and abroad to do the same.

Already the U.S. State Department has criticised the results and the FGGN calls on the EU and the international community to reject the results. These acts of electoral fraud and injustices should neither be encouraged nor rewarded as it will have serious consequences for democracy and good governance in Africa's most populous country.

In order to avert the truncation of Nigeria's nascent democracy, the FGGN calls for immediate resolutions of the problems. The FGGN recommends, among other options, the following measures:

- Fresh elections should be conducted between now and 29<sup>th</sup> May 2003 in all the states of the federation. Failure to do so, the government should hand over power to an interim national government to undertake such an onerous task of conducting fresh elections.

- All officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission should be dismissed and replaced with 'truly' impartial, credible and trustworthy persons to conduct fresh elections.
- The current Nigerian government, the PDP, the electoral body and security services should apologise unreservedly to the Nigerian people.
- The US, the EU and the Commonwealth (whose observer groups have witnessed and confirmed the electoral malpractices) as well as the rest of the international community should act quickly and decisively to bring about a speedy resolution of the situation by insisting on fresh, credible and transparent elections.
- In the event that the will of the Nigerian people and that of the international community is defied, the FGGN calls on the US, the EU and the Commonwealth countries not to recognise the government that would be sworn-in and to impose appropriate sanctions on the officials and beneficiaries of the imposed government.

The FGGN commends all the opposition parties for rejecting the election results and urges them to continue to remain united in their fight against dishonesty, tyranny and blatant disregard for the citizens of Nigeria.

Long Live the Federal Republic of Nigeria!

Long Live the *Foundation for Good Governance in Nigeria*!!

For and on behalf of the *Foundation*:

**Mallam Garba Sani**  
**Chairman**  
**(Tel: +4479 6880 6992)**

**Dr. Arabo Bayo**  
**General Secretary**  
**(Tel: +44790058 8384)**

**Dr. Usman Ahmed**  
**Publicity Secretary**  
**(Tel: +4477 2149 4458)**

Secretariat  
6 Lineker Close  
Castlefield, Stafford  
Staffordshire, ST16 1AL, UK

**Tel:** +44 1785 244 636 **E-mail:** arabodigil@fsmail.net