

FOUNDATION FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE & DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

PRESS RELEASE

2007 ELECTION: A CALL FOR CHANGE

After 46 years of nationhood and the massive God-given human and material resources, Nigeria and its people should have been holding their heads high in the international community. The reality is that Nigeria has little or nothing to show in relation to other comparable Nations such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Brazil, Argentina, South Africa and even Ghana.

We at the Foundation for Good Governance and Development in Nigeria (FGGN), UK, have found it necessary to call, at this crucial stage Nigeria's development, on all Nigerians and friends of Nigeria to support a change for the betterment of everyone. The Nigerian General Elections in April 2007 provide a unique platform for initiating such a change.

For many years, elections in Nigeria have been marred with malpractices, mostly engineered by the ruling parties at state and federal levels, leading to violence and a restive society that shows its total rejection of the results. This has often led to military interventions in the past and of recent, as seen in the last four years, to increased crime, insecurity and disregard to law enforcement agencies and the judiciary. The lawlessness in the Niger Delta and other parts of the country are as a direct result of the rigged elections of 2003. This group of Nigerians see the government and those governing them as having no legitimacy to rule nor moral right or capability to stop their lawlessness. This is because these are the same politicians who used them to commit all illegalities and crime that put the so called leaders in those positions. Moreover, these leaders continue to commit the same act of lawlessness and crime. The police and other security agents were equally used during the 2003 elections to commit electoral fraud in favour of the ruling party and government. After the rigged election, these policemen end up not having their salaries and allowances paid and continued their crimes in partnership with the political thugs. This is the

root of the lawlessness that we see in the society.

Needless to say, the elite and the middle class are to blame for much of Nigeria's problems either by being party to the electoral fraud or by their apathy. Those who were directly involved in the electoral crimes included PDP stalwarts who have now been edged out of the party, security chiefs like Tofa Balogun, INEC officials, and errand boys of the corrupt ruling elites seeking for short term gains and hoping for further gratifications from their pay masters. The apathetic group looked on and said there was nothing they can do because they were powerless. This group includes all of us, at home and abroad, who did nothing to oppose the electoral fraud in 2003 and previous elections. With the exception of a negligible minority, the middle class has been wiped out. The majority in this group cannot afford a descent car, good healthcare, a balance diet or education for their children that is similar to the one they themselves had many years ago. They have no electricity supply, they live daily in fear of armed robbers both at home and on the road and they are not sure about their jobs or their pension. Equally, all the public institutions have been taken over by the ruling elites and their cronies. Subsequently the middle class and their children, if they are lucky, will have to work for these corrupt elites who took over these institutions.

With these developments, it is therefore not surprising that the masses have found themselves powerless and leaderless. Many of them lost hope in the electoral process and did not bother to participate, as they saw that it is not their vote that matters but what the powers that be decide to announce as the final result. The danger of doing nothing to prevent electoral fraud is that it encourages the government and the ruling party to pursue self-interested policies with impunity, and thereby engage in under-delivery of basic social services. It is therefore not surprising that since rigging itself to office in 2003, the Obasanjo administration has woefully failed to provide basic social amenities to the Nigerian people in

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

Tel: +44 1785 244 636 **E-mail:** Secretary@fggn.org, info@fggn.org

Website: www.fggn.org

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spite of the massive oil revenues the government received during the last four years. Power outages have worsened; roads have become death traps; air safety has been severely compromised; education standards have rapidly deteriorated; hospitals have been reduced to mere consulting clinics, with inadequate beds and drugs; crimes and insecurity have risen to new heights, and youth unemployment has tripled. And the list goes on! Many youths, especially the children of the poor have now taken to crime and lawlessness while their parents look on with dismay and anger. This is a sad reflection of today's Nigeria which was described as "the largest failed state on earth" by the Atlantic Monthly, a leading US foreign policy journal in their April 2006 edition.

This spectre of failure that has become the reality of Nigeria has never been as bad as the last eight years of misrule by the cabal of PDP elites. The original PDP had men of integrity among whom were Chief Alex Ikweme, Chief Chuba Okadigbo (late), Chief Sunday Awoniyi, Chief Harry Marshal (late), Chief Solomon Lar, General T Y Danjuma, Audu Ogbe, Alhaji Abubakar Rimi, Alhaji Sani Zangon Daura and Adamu Ciroma to name a but a few. All have left the party with a bitter taste and two (Chiefs Okadigbo and Marshal) paid the ultimate price with their lives as they were murdered in cold blood. The party is now left to the Anenihs, the Obasanjos, the Chris Ubas, the Mantus and the El Rufais of this world! Do we need to say more? No.

We should not allow the experience of the 2003 elections to repeat itself. We, at the FGGN, call on all Nigerians and the international community to search their conscience, look to the future and call a spade a spade in the interest of humanity and our unborn generations and effect a meaningful change. We call for a change in our minds, attitudes, and actions. We call for a peaceful change in the 2007 General Elections. We call on all groups and parties to make a peaceful change possible. We call for a change not only from one civilian government to another but also from one party to another if

that is the popular wish of the people. We are at a crossroad. In May 2007 we stand a chance of being Africa's largest democracy (and the world's seventh) looking into the future with hope or staring down the odious path of anarchy and hopelessness. The choice is ours.

Further more, we urge INEC to answer the call and yearnings of all people who are calling for a free and fair election. We make this call mindful of the role played by INEC and its officials in rigging the 2003 election in favour of the ruling party and government. We are also mindful of the very close relationship between the current INEC officials and the Presidency and PDP chieftains, given the recent INEC Commissioner's visit to the home of Anenih and other incidences. INEC should save us from chaos and forceful change that will inevitably come if the will of the people is subverted. Nigerians and the international community should hold INEC officials responsible if such an unfortunate situation were to arise.

To the Security Services, we want to remind them that their ultimate responsibility is to the people of Nigeria and to God, not to the persons in power. They should enforce the law of the land to safeguard the wishes of Nigerians, not the selfish interests of those in power. We, at the Foundation, would like to call on them to have a change of heart and behaviour away from the malpractices and criminal connivance with the ruling party and government that they exhibited in the 2003 election and as shown by the EFCC in the run up to these elections. We urge them to refrain from harassing opposition party representatives at the calling of the ruling party. They should rather be even-handed in maintaining law and order during and after the election. We urge them to protect the citizens, not to maim them.

We, at FGGN, call on the Nigerian elites to realise that falsehood will not last forever and that it is in their interest to make the society functional and ease the anger that is raging in the minds of the masses as those who do not have see the elites lavishing with impunity. There is a limit to which you cannot push a people any further. Those who

FGGN Secretariat
6 Lineker Close
Castlefield, Stafford
Staffordshire, ST16 1AL, UK
Tel: +44 1785 244 636 E-mail: Secretary@fggn.org, info@fggn.org
Website: www.fggn.org

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managed to go to school and now find themselves in abject poverty, with no jobs, will not continue to sit down and look on. Very soon the kind of lawlessness, with hostage taking, that we see in Niger Delta will be in all the regions if nothing is done now. It is time for the elites to come on board and support a genuine peaceful change, for in the event of a violent change, they will be the biggest losers. Elites in developed countries who make the maintenance of the rule of law a priority, pay the unemployed, provide free basic education and health know that that is where their security lies. The middle class and the poor also have more at stake by doing nothing to prevent electoral fraud. They are the biggest losers under the current dispensation, and so they should actively participate to effect a positive change in the country. We therefore urge the middle class and the masses to come together and make sure that a free and fair election is conducted and that they should not shy away from correcting falsely declared results.

To President Obasanjo, the FGGN calls on him to have a change of heart and not see the election as a “do or die” affair. We also call on him not to use his incumbency to rig the election as he and his vice, Atiku Abubakar, did in 2003. We urge Obasanjo not to impose a president on Nigerians as he imposed Presidential Candidate on his party. Have a change of heart and allow Nigerians to elect their leader as they elected you in 1999 when you just came out of prison. Have a change of heart and hand over to the person elected not to the person you like. Give Nigerians hope, as you said in your article during Babangida’s rule, and not despair as your recent pronouncements have done. Take your place in history as a man of honour not one who destroyed Nigeria.

Finally, we call on all concerned citizens not only to come together, vote and ensure a free and fair election but also to make sure Nigeria’s democracy succeeds. The coming together is essential to avoid a forced one party state as the ruling government and party (PDP) are trying to

establish by use of their incumbency power. We urge the opposition parties to come together and make sure that they prevent the incumbent PDP government from rigging the election. Better still, the opposition parties should throw their weight behind one presidential candidate to boot the current PDP out of office. The experience of Kenya four years ago should serve as a good lesson for Nigerian opposition parties. We therefore call on all the opposition parties to bury their differences and work for the common goal of preventing the repeat of 2003 electoral fraud. We call on them to rally behind a strong and honest leader who can change this country for the benefit of all, not for the few.

Nigeria needs a person of high integrity, honesty, probity, true anticorruption crusader, someone who takes public service seriously to serve the people, not himself. We, therefore, call on Nigerians to vote for change and vote for such a leader to help change our Nation for the better.

*Long Live the Federal Republic of Nigeria!
Long Live the Foundation for Good Governance
and Development in Nigeria!!*

For and on behalf of *the Foundation*:

Dr. Arabo Bayo
General Secretary

DrArabo@fggn.org
(Tel: +44 7900 588 384)

Ahmed Sani Stores
Chairman,
Media Publicity Committee
Ahmed.Sani@fggn.org
(Tel: +44 7966 969 243)

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

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Website: www.fggn.org