

CDD PRE-ELECTION PRESS STATEMENT

October 8, 2020, For Immediate Release

CDD Tasks Stakeholders on Credible Ondo Governorship Poll

- **Commends Citizens Focus On Issues of Governance**
- **Says Less Attacks Show Level of Confidence In INEC, Urges Commission To Reciprocate**
- **Tasks Security, Government On Measures To Prevent Vote Buying**

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen of the Press,

Forty-eight hours to the commencement of voting in the October 10 Governorship election, the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) through its dedicated Election Analysis Centre (EAC) continues to collect information from our trained non-partisan observers deployed across the 18 Local Governments Areas of Ondo State. CDD observer reports have provided important perspectives on trends in the pre-election environment leading up to the Governorship poll. From now, through Election Day, and to the post-election period CDD will share updates on issues relating to the credibility of the electoral process, and how to ensure its outcome reflect the will of the people of Ondo State.

It is pertinent to note that CDD observation of the electoral process is a citizen-led, non-partisan effort aimed at ensuring the election measures up to minimum credibility requirements according to global norms and best practices such as: (i) Article 21(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that: everyone has a right to take part in the government of their country, directly or through chosen representatives, and (ii) Article 21(3) of the same declaration which asserts, “the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will be expressed in periodic and genuine elections, which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.”

People of Ondo State Yearn for Credible Electoral Process

As observed in the last CDD EAC update on the Ondo State Governorship election, the people in this State have shown a refreshing resolve to focus their debates and conversations around the October 10 governorship election on key governance issues. CDD observation shows that the level of the spread of fake news and misinformation in the Ondo election has been relatively low when compared to recent governorship elections in Kogi, Bayelsa and Ondo State. This positive trend is partly so because citizens are busy discussing issues of governance. CDD hopes the people of Ondo State will put those issues in perspective as they go to cast their ballot on October 10.

Preliminary analysis of social media conversations and engagement on facebook groups and pages created by supporters of the candidates shows there is less focus on the spread of fake news. Compared to how social media was used to misinform unsuspecting members of the public

in the Kogi, Bayelsa and most recently in the Edo State Governorship election, it is apparent Ondo State is faring better. CDD social media content analysis for the Ondo State governorship election indicates that the major concerns raised by prospective voters in their posts are on the problem of possible violence and the challenge of voter inducement.

In the light of the foregoing, CDD urges voters in Ondo State to continue to frame the election as a contest to be determined on the basis of the of which of the political actors has the best ideas to solve the problems facing citizens. It is in line with global best practice for citizens to take all political contestants to task on how they intend to accomplish the promises they have made on the campaign trail. CDD calls on all political actors in the electoral contest of October 10 to take a cue from the people by focusing their discussion during the remaining part of the campaign on discussing how they will govern.

In line with this, CDD calls on the political parties, and their candidates to refrain from making preemptive statements, allegations and counter allegations, which could stoke partisan tensions and heat up the polity during the rest of the campaign period and on Election Day. The war of words, which the political actors are fond of engaging in adds to value to the quest by citizens for credible elections and by extension, good governance. Such verbal altercations are capable of undermining voter confidence and delegitimizing the outcome of the election. It is therefore important in the spirit of the signed Peace Accord for the politicians to be mindful of what they say and do as voters head to the polls.

INEC Should Reciprocate Confidence Reposed In It

Another interesting trend observed by CDD in the Ondo State governorship election is the absence of or reduced level of attacks on the electoral umpire, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Compared to governorship elections in other states, INEC has been largely spared of denunciations and attacks, which are clearly aimed at undermining the idea of the Commission's impartiality. Politicians normally resort to the strategy of denouncing INEC so that if they lose the election, they can quickly blame INEC's alleged compromise as the reason for their loss. In Ondo State, INEC has not had to respond to such vicious potshots aimed at undermining its non-partisan role, and distracting it. CDD believes this to be a sign of the high level of confidence the people of Ondo State have in the Commission. INEC therefore cannot afford to fritter away this level of good will. It has to ensure the confidence reposed in it is properly reciprocated. This it can do by ensuring materials arrive at the polling units on time; INEC should therefore consider the nature of the terrain in some parts of the state, especially the riverine and mountainous nature of some Local Government Areas.

CDD hopes INEC will strategically factor these areas in its deployment plans to ensure there is no late arrival of materials. These factors will have to be considered in the aspect of reverse logistics, especially with respect to collation of results. Given the terrain difficulty in those LGAs, CDD calls on INEC to ensure its results viewing portal is capable of documenting results, especially from areas, which will pose a terrain problem. Subsequently, INEC would have to find ways to mitigate

the effect of the largely partisan disposition of transport unions, including the National Union of Road Transport Workers and the Motorcyclists Association. The partisan posture of these unions could pose challenges, which may create credibility and logistics problems for the entire process. Incidentally, the NURTW is the body INEC relies on for transportation of electoral materials. This may create a problem for INEC in the area of getting materials to all voting areas in the state. CDD calls on INEC to prepare back up plans just in case there is a system failure in its logistics deployment as a result of the partisan disposition of the transport union.

On Early Warning Signs of Violence And Need For Strategic Deployment of Security

Since political campaigns began, CDD has been monitoring the electoral terrain to document early warning signs for prevention of violence. Our observers documented an upsurge of political tensions in at least 11 of the 18 local government areas of the State with several reported cases of election-related violence. A trend analysis of data gathered so far indicates that group clashes, attacks on party secretariat and political rallies and campaigns by thugs and party supporters escalated in most LGAs across the State with the highest number of cases reported in Akure South and Idanre LGAs. Of the 34 incidents of electoral violence reported between August and early October 2020, at least 12 cases of clashes during campaigns were reported. Also CDD further calls on the security agencies to monitor movement into Ondo State from other states. CDD observers reported seeing scores of buses entering Akure the Ondo State capital on the night of October 7, 2020. While freedom of movement is a constitutionally guaranteed right, it is up to the security agencies to ensure those coming into the state have no sinister intention with respect to the election.

While these early warning signs are not definite indicators to give 100 percent certainty that there will be violence in the areas highlighted, they nonetheless call for a strategic deployment of security. CDD is of the view the presence of security in areas with history of election violence will deter elements which would be inclined to resort to violence. CDD observation indicates the security agencies, especially the Police have been making the right statements and commitment on their readiness to play a non-partisan role in the electoral process. We also recognize positive steps taken so far, including innovations to enhance transparency and deter bad behavior among officers on election duties. CDD however calls on the security agencies to brief their officers on their specific roles; we do not expect to see officers who turn a blind eye when electoral offences,

On Welfare of Election Workers

In terms of management of personnel, CDD calls on INEC and the security agencies to make the welfare of election workers and officers of security agencies topmost priority. As the experience from the recently concluded election in Edo State shows, many of the delays in the timely arrival of election materials were caused by arguments over payment of allowances. INEC should use the remaining time to firm up its plans for elections workers, just as we urge security agencies to ensure the welfare of the rank and file is adequately catered for. This will ensure they are prepared for their various assignment. Welfare of police officers and other members of the security forces has to be taken care to ensure they are not susceptible to inducement by

desperate politicians who may want to get them to play roles, which would undermine the credibility of the election.

Conclusion

To conclude CDD must draw attention again and underline the following emerging trends in the politics and administration of the 2020 Ondo governorship elections that should be sustained or addressed to brighten the prospects of competitive party and electoral politics not only in the state but also in Nigeria generally. First, the gratifying focus on issues-based electioneering emerging out of the 2020 Ondo elections is refreshing, noteworthy and encouraged across the country. Secondly, the elections, particularly their issues-based electioneering focus, have given vocal voice to women and the youth who seem determined, despite great odds, to protect their vote and ensure that it counts. Third, the weakness of internal party democracy, reflected in controversies trailing the nomination processes for selecting party governorship candidates, resulting in party fractionalization and defections, has mixed implications: while it bodes well for more competitive multiparty electoral politics, it also tends to engulf it in violent party and electoral politics. Fourth, INEC's administration and management of the 2020 Ondo governorship electoral process, continues to reflect the benefits of its substantial and progressive investment in internal administrative and financial audit and reform and in high technology to sanitize the voter registration and voting process. However, there is still much INEC needs to, and should do to fix and strengthen weak links in its logistic chain for the deployment of personnel and materials for elections, with particular attention given to mitigating fault lines in the role of NURTW in the transportation deployment links, and also in the provisioning for the welfare and timely remuneration of the ad hoc staff and security personnel so deployed. Fifth, there remains the challenging problem of what the civil society organizations and the public generally can and should do to diminish the abuse of the power of incumbency for partisan party and electoral advantage.