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CDD ELECTION ANALYSIS CENTRE

Akure, Ondo State, Saturday, 4 pm, October 10, 2020

Preliminary Statement On the Conduct of the Ondo State Governorship Election

Today, voters across the 18 Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Ondo State went to the polls to elect a Governor. The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) through its dedicated Election Analysis Centre (EAC) has been keeping a close eye on the conduct of the poll and the level of adherence to key processes critical to ensuring a free, fair and credible election. CDD's efforts through the EAC is to use non-partisan citizen observation of the electoral process to ensure the votes cast reflect the expressed democratic preferences of the electorate in Ondo State. In reaching the initial conclusions in this preliminary statement, CDD collated reports from our trained and accredited nonpartisan observers.

This preliminary statement provides an overview of our initial findings on the conduct of the election, and the extent to which poll officials, voters, and security officials and other stakeholders in the process adhered to crucial processes, extant laws and regulatory guidelines governing the conduct of the poll.

CDD Methodology For The Observation

CDD methodology for the observation of the election is based on the core principles of non-partisan election observation as enshrined in extant national laws, guidelines, and international best practices. The CDD EAC deployment plan is based on a purposive sampling technique. The EAC selected wards and polling units to be observed based on the situational and political contextual analysis of the State. Hence, the choice of wards and PUs to be observed was informed by the following consideration: the number of polling unit in a ward relative to other wards in LGA in both States, history of incidents of electoral violence and widespread electoral malpractice in previous elections particularly 2016 off cycle governorship and the 2019 general elections, cases of pre-election violence, and the Local Government Areas and strongholds of key

contestants and political parties. A total of 255 accredited observers are deployed to observe the process.

The Centre, in partnership with media organisations, deployed 30 trained journalists to promptly detect and report fraud and any forms of electoral malfeasance in the election. They also observed accreditation, voting and collation processes at the polling units, ward collation centres and local government collation centres across the 18 LGAs in the State. At the EAC, we shall continue to provide real-time and rigorous analysis of elections in Nigeria.

The EAC is manned seasoned electoral experts, political analyst, disinformation analysts and media experts.

INEC Logistics and Conduct of Process

CDD observed significant improvement in the deployment of election logistics by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). There was timely arrival of materials, and officials. Our observers reported the availability of all necessary sensitive and non-sensitive materials, which include forms EC 60B, EC60 (B), EC 30A, hand sanitizers, cubicle boxes, ballot papers, card readers, stamp pads, liquid gum, indelible markers, sealed boxes, Smart Card Readers and other materials across polling units.

However, the positive effect, of the early arrival of poll officials was seriously affected by the morning rain in several LGAs in the state. The rain occasioned disruption in the voting process, and compromised the secrecy of the vote. This was the case in many LGAs, notably Owo, Ose, Akoko South, and Akure North. It is heartwarming that in some instances, voters insisted on continuing with the exercise in spite of the rain. In Ose LGA, despite the heavy rain, voters defied the weather to exercise their franchise. In Ward 5, Polling Unit 07, Akure South LGA, our observers reported that, although no canopies were provided for shelter, party agents and voters remained under the rain, alongside security personnel and INEC officials to keep a close watch of the ballot box. CDD commends this demonstration of the resilient disposition of voters and their resolve to protect the sanctity of the vote.

The elections also recorded instances where voters, who transferred their registration to a new station, were unable to exercise their franchise because of the transfer.

As the time of reporting CDD had received reports of attacks targeted at INEC staff and personnel. In Akure South LGA, CDD observers reported cases of hoodlums chasing away RAC technicians. If RAC technicians are chased out of the polling units and, as a result, prevented from carrying out their duties, such an action will compromise the credibility of the process of uploading of results unto the INEC Results Viewing Platform. The RAC technicians are also the ones whose role is to maintain Smart Card Readers. Preventing them from doing their duty also creates problems in the area of fixing card readers, which develop fault in the course of the election. These and similar

incidents occurred in Ward 05, PU 008, Odigbo LGA, Arogbo II, PU 001, Ward 7, Ese Odo LGA, Ward 06, PU 007, Ward 02 PU 16 in Idanre LGA, and Ward 4 PU 09, 11, 12 and 13, Ilaje LGA.

We implore the security agencies to provide adequate security to INEC and her officials until the final declaration of a winner.

Security Deployment

Our observers reported an average deployment of security agents numbering between 4 to 8 at each polling Unit. They include men and women of the Nigeria Police, Customs Service, Immigration, Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps. CDD Observers reported that, although the officers were generally courteous, there were instances when security agents looked away as vote buying occurred in local governments across the state.

Vote Buying

One positive trend noticed and reported by CDD observers that in several polling units voters pushed back against vote buying by individuals seeking to induce voters to vote for the preferred candidates of the agents. This was documented in Idanre (Ward 3, PU 6; Ward 8, PU 1,2 and 3; and Ward 5 PU 1), where voters generally rebuffed and rejected the inducement, and declared their determination to vote for candidates of their choice. The vote-buying attempt was not without some drama: there was a debate over the attempted inducement---some involved in the debate urged voters approached to sell their votes but to vote their conscience, while others disagreed. In the end, the majority of the voters rejected the money offered and chased the voter buyers away from the Polling Unit. It is noteworthy, according to the report of the CDD observers the offer and the debate over it happened in the presence of security personnel.

At several other polling units, CDD observed a consistent pattern of vote buying, involving vote buyers who used various devices to evade the watch of security officials and election observers. CDD observers documented attempts by political actors to outspend one another by making available large sums disbursed to community leaders for onward distribution to voters. CDD observation showed that whereas in the past the *modus operandi* was to distribute cash discreetly at points close to the polling unit, the new tactic is to create outposts where voters can go to collect cash after showing evidence that they voted for the preferred candidates of the vote buyers.

It was alleged by those the CDD observers spoke with about vote buying at polling units on Election Day that bulk sums ranging from N150,000 to N600,000 were earmarked for each polling unit across each LGA were handed over to popular figures, especially youth groups to share among voters in their areas.

Another vote buying tactic used was to make electronic cash transfers to the voter after proving he or she voted for the preferred candidate of the vote buyer. CDD observers reported that party

agents largely stayed away from coordinating vote buying. In Ward 11, Polling Unit 021, Akure South LGA, CDD observed that political parties designated someone, who is not a party agent, but appears to be neutral to direct voters to an outpost where cash could be distributed. In several instances, disagreement between vote buyers and sellers resulted in altercation. CDD observers reported tension at Oke Aro, Polling Unit 6, when the money for the vote buying did not go round, thereby upsetting a voter who had cast his ballot for the buying party. In polling unit 005, Akoko South, observers reported that party agents openly induced voters. CDD observers similarly noted instances where voters on their own displayed their ballots to assure a particular party agent they had cast their ballots for the preferred candidate of the agent.

Disregard for COVID-19 Protocols

Compared to the Edo election, INEC made improved efforts to implement and enforce the COVID 19 protocols. In some polling units, infrared thermometer, methylated spirit and hand sanitizer were used, as stipulated in INEC protocols for the election. However the use of 2-tier queue system for accreditation and voting was not adhered across observed polling units. Some voters used face masks but in general there was complete disregard for COVID 19 protocols. CDD has reached the conclusion that the blatant disregard for COVID-prevention protocol is a societal problem caused by the belief that the virus was non-existent or not as serious as it is held out to be.

Electoral Violence and Offences

CDD observers recorded pockets of violence during the election, although the incidents were widespread enough to undermine the peaceful conduct of the election. For instance, CDD observers reported an outbreak of violence in Ijomu Polling Unit 7 where a voter was attacked with a machete, and badly cut before law enforcement agents arrived at the scene. The bigger problem with respect to this particular incident is that the law enforcement officers did not attempt to fish out, and bring the perpetrators of that particular attack to book. CDD observers reported that the incident created panic and led to many voters fleeing the polling unit, as they believed there would be no security on ground to protect them in the case of attacks by hoodlums. There were also instances of hoodlums defying the ban on vehicular movement to unleash mayhem and intimidate voters. CDD observers also reported cases of party agents canvassing to assist elderly or disabled voters to vote. There were also observer reports detailing attempts to use another voter's Permanent Voter's Card, as well as the impersonation of a party agent.

Fake News and Misinformation

In the course of the election, CDD fact checkers monitored cyberspace to counter fake news and other false narratives. A number of fake news were successfully debunked by CDD dedicated team of fact checkers. Misinformation claiming that particular party candidates had withdrawn from the race was common on Election Day. This was not doubt targeted at deceiving the voters who wanted to cast their ballot for the targeted candidates. There was also fake news claiming

the death of people at specific polling unit, and further asserting that prominent figures were injured in the alleged attack. CDD successfully fact checked and debunked these claims, and will continue to do so, as voting ends, and the process moves on to result collation.

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