



Statement: Situation Report of Incidents of Pre-Election Atrocities Connected With #NigeriaDecides 2023

Ahead of Nigeria's 2023 general elections, the Incident Centre for Election Atrocities (ICEA) calls on all Nigerians to shun violence and insist on a free, fair and peaceful election. It also calls on the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and allied state apparatus, especially the security forces, to facilitate a conducive environment devoid of intimidation, inequity and the abuse of electoral processes. The Centre reminds all stakeholders that it will continue to monitor election-related atrocities and seek accountability.

In August 2022, Atrocities Watch Africa and Global Rights analyzed key factors that may influence and determine the election outcomes.¹ Chiefly, they recognized the country's ongoing context of endemic insecurity, atrocious comments by politicians and the deliberate spread of fake news as potential catalysts endangering the facilitation of free and fair elections.

Since its establishment, ICEA has facilitated a platform to coordinate evidence collection, preservation, and advocacy on elections-related atrocities, in particular, the collation and documentation of verified incidents of hate speech, malicious propagation of fake news, violence and other forms of elections-related atrocities. ICEA's tracking in the past three months showed that insecurity and atrocious speech could disrupt the smooth conduct of the elections and may suppress voter turnout in certain areas.

The Centre's tracking from December 1, 2022 to February 24, 2023 (the last day before the elections), affirms that the pre-election season was fraught with incidents of politically motivated abductions and killings, attacks on INEC facilities and police stations, attacks on political party rallies, politicians and politically exposed persons, and numerous incidents of hate speech and fake news. Specifically, our tracking for the period showed at least **89** incidents of politically-motivated killings (including of 30 security personnel) and **18** abductions (including of 1 Police Officer). There were at least **13** attacks on political campaign rallies. Within the period, there were at least **7** arson attacks on INEC facilities and at least **12** brazen attacks on police, military and para-military facilities.

The Centre also documented the weaponization of hate speech and the propagation of fake news by politicians and their supporters in both physical and virtual forums.

These trends overshadowed the need for issue-based campaigning, which could have expanded the space for productive conversations between political office seekers and the electorates. This observation

¹ Atrocities Watch Africa, "Nigeria 2023: a major test for democracy in need of critical support," 31 August 2022, <https://atrocitieswatch.org/publications/nigeria-2023-a-major-test-for-democracy-in-need-of-critical-support/>

informed the continuous call by ICEA for the candidates of the various political parties and their supporters to guard against utterances capable of truncating the peaceful electioneering process.

While insecurity is endemic throughout the country, the Centre is particularly concerned about the intensity of the violence in the South-East where there have been targeted attacks on INEC facilities and the issuance of threats that there will be no elections in the region. This attempt at intimidating voters is highly likely to suppress voters in the region. For example, about a week ago, a group of armed men who self-identified as "Disciples of Nnamdi Kanu" or "Ụmụ Oma" stormed Eke-Ụtụtu market in Orsu local government area of Imo state shooting sporadically into the air and directing traders to accept the old Naira bills and threatening to execute anyone that attempts to vote.

On February 22, 2023, less than three days before the elections, gunmen attacked and burned alive the Labour Party's senatorial candidate for Enugu East, Barrister Oyibo Chukwu and 8 other party supporters.

While security agents have apprehended and charged a few of the perpetrators of these atrocities, we note that most of them, in particular, high-profile politicians have gone unpunished. We, therefore, call on the Nigerian government, security agents and the courts to be proactive in ensuring an end to the impunity which has been a hallmark of elections in Nigeria and has helped to perpetuate the cycle of violence and atrocities.

The Centre hopes for a de-escalation of the forms of atrocities that have trended so far, especially with the signing of the Peace Accord by the presidential political candidates on Wednesday 22,2023, it is crucial to maintain an unwavering focus on ensuring that the electoral process remains free, fair, and credible and more importantly, a peaceful Nigeria, post-elections. We will therefore continue to monitor developments and document incidents of post-election atrocities where they occur.

The 2023 Nigerian general elections represent a critical moment for the future of the country and West Africa as a whole. The entire world is watching, and the outcome of the election will undoubtedly shape Nigeria's future. We, therefore, urge all Nigerians to remain vigilant and peaceful, and we call on the government and all stakeholders to ensure that the election is conducted in a transparent, free, and fair manner.

Signed on Behalf of the Incident Centre for Election Atrocities (ICEA)

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