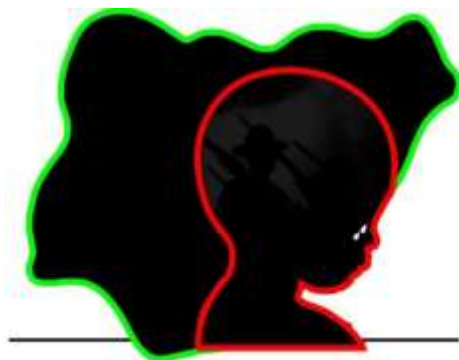


Community of Practice Against Mass Atrocities in Nigeria



Monday, December 19, 2022

Press Statement

For Immediate Release

Stemming the Tide of Election Related Atrocities and Hate Speech in Nigeria

In the period since Nigeria's general election in 2019, the Independence National Electoral Commission has suffered at least 50 violent attacks across 15 states in Nigeria, some of which have resulted in the killing of its staff, quite apart from the loss of property and election materials. With balloting scheduled to take place in 68 days, a rising tide of violence, hate speech, intolerance and election-related atrocities now threatens to derail Nigeria's 2023 general elections.

As its contribution towards averting this possibility, the Community of Practice against Mass Atrocities in Nigeria today announces that it is establishing a capability to monitor all acts of election-related violence with a view to pursuing accountability for them within Nigeria if possible, and before international institutions where necessary. For this purpose, the Community of Practice has today decided to establish an **Incident Centre on Election Atrocities (ICEA)** to harmonise and co-ordinate evidence collection, preservation, and advocacy on violence connected with #NigeriaDecidess 2023.

Background

Historically, Nigeria's election cycles have been highly contested and volatile. As we draw closer to the 2023 general elections, it is plain to all that this cycle of elections could be more violent than anything the country has seen since the return to civil rule in 1999. Ahead of the 2023 elections, it is the case that the prevalence of election-related atrocities as well as their impact is reinforced by an underlying crisis of insecurity, which already endangers a significant part of the country on a level unseen before since 1999.

A recent report published by *ThisDay* Newspaper¹ on 2nd October 2022 indicates that insecurity may make it impossible to safely organize elections in up to 686 wards across the country, representing

¹ Gboyega Akinsanmi, "Insecurity Threatens Conducts of 2023 Elections in 686 Communities", *Thisday*, 2 October, 2022, available at [Insecurity Threatens Conduct of 2023 Elections in 686 Communities – THISDAYLIVE](#)

7.78% of the 8,812 electoral wards in Nigeria. In addition, there is uncontrolled access to small arms and light weapons, increasing the odds that violence could get deadly. A 2021 report by SBM Intelligence suggests that over 6 billion firearms are in civilian possession in Nigeria. According to the Auditor-General of the Federation, in 2019 alone, 178,459 firearms belonging to the Nigeria Police Force were reported missing or unaccounted for². These include 88,078 AK-47 rifles, and 3,907 assorted rifles and pistols. Most of these firearms have clearly ended up in unauthorized hands. Already with the Atrocities tracking conducted by Global Rights, 115 persons including INEC officials have been killed, and INEC offices burnt in recent times running up to the 2023 general elections. Within the last 4 years, there have been 50 attacks on INEC facilities with Imo having the highest number with 11 incidents, followed by Osun, 7, Akwa-Ibom 5, Enugu 5, Ebonyi 4, Cross River 4, Abia 4, Anambra 2, Taraba 2, Borno 1, Ogun, 1, Lagos 1, Bayelsa 1, Ondo 1 and Kaduna 1

Nigeria's Presidential Election in 2011, recorded at least **934** fatalities. The Presidential Panel which investigated that crisis, headed by Sheikh Ahmed Lemu, highlighted inflammatory campaign utterances by politicians and their supporters, reinforced by divisive sermons of hate and hostility in mosques and churches across the country as a major cause of the ensuing violence. They also noted several violent incidents were triggered by fake news propagated over social media.

Similarly, in the aftermath of the 2015 general elections, the National Human Rights Commission reported incontrovertible evidence of hate speech and fake news as core factors that resulted in election-related violence across the country and resulted in more than 58 persons killed in the campaign season even before the first ballots were cast³. This trend seems not to be abating and is already shaping the narratives around the 2023 elections.

Contextualizing the 2023 elections within Nigeria's ongoing endemic insecurity, the proliferation of arms and light weapons, the divisive political rhetoric of ethnicity and religion, high levels of citizens' mistrust, a floundering economy and decades of maladministration of critical institutions including the justice system, readily flags amber early warning signals that the upcoming elections will be highly volatile. The warning signs are clearly being escalated through the manifest desperation of politicians and their supporters who are resorting to hate speech and fake news to control the polity. Nigeria cannot afford any further violence.

Added to this dimension is the level of digital penetration which affords immediacy to the amplification of hate speech and disinformation to an extent that was previously unknown, especially in the hands of desperate politicians and their supporters who are using these platforms as tools to propagate and instigate violence against opponents and dissenting views.

In its effort to address election related atrocities, the Community of Practice will seek collaboration with public and other institutions in different parts of the country as well as with traditional non-governmental partners. We are particularly gratified that in south-east Nigeria, the Secretariat of the Truth, Justice, and Peace Commission in Anambra State has agreed to lend its weight to this project and we are hoping that candidates, political parties, faith, civic, and public institutions and office holders in other parts of Nigeria will follow this example.

² Azimazi Momoh Jimoh and Adamu Abuh, "AuGF indicts Police for alleged missing 178,459 arms, ammunition", *The Guardian*, 3 January, 2022, available at <https://guardian.ng/news/augf-indicts-police-for-alleged-missing-178459-arms-ammunition/>

³ Nnenna Ibeh, "58 Nigerians killed in pre-election violence so far", *Premium Times*, 13 February 2015, available at <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/176802-58-nigerians-killed-2015-pre-election-violence-far-rights-commission.html>

We call on the government to secure vulnerable communities, as highlighted in several reports. If elections do not take place in these communities, or if they are marred by violence, then the elections cannot be considered to be free and fair and would have failed irrespective of who “wins”.

Nigeria’s justice institutions are key to addressing this menace – impunity has been the fertile ground upon which hate speech, fake news and other forms of electoral atrocities have flourished. INEC had complained in just about a month ago that they faced over 600 cases in relation to pre-election matters alone and rising⁴. We therefore call on the judiciary and law enforcement to act in the interest of democracy and the wellbeing of our nation. There should be no sacred cows.

We call on all Nigerians to join us in being vanguards of our civic space, especially social and broadcast media; document and report observed incidents of hate speech, records of fake news, and other forms of incitement to electoral violence to the secretariat of the Community of Practice Against Mass Atrocities in Nigeria and its partner organizations.

We again reiterate that Nigeria is already suffering from multidimensional forms of violence, added to the endemic sufferings Nigerians are already enduring from the economy and weak institutions, we cannot add an extra layer of gunpowder of fake news and hate speech to our polity – it will combust. It is therefore our collective duty to prevent this, and we will.

Thank you

Signed for the Community of Practice Against Mass Atrocities:

Abiodun Baiyewu

Executive Director, Global Rights

Adamu Kotorkoshi

Executive Director, Center for Community Excellence

Dr Chris Kwaja

Executive Director, African Initiative for Peace Building, Advocacy and Advancement (AfriPeace)

Merit Emmanuel

Co-Founder, Sesor Empowerment Foundation

Iheoma Obibi

Executive Director, Alliances for Africa

Ken Henshaw

Executive Director, We the People

Redzie Jugo

Team Lead, Srarina Initiative for Peace, Justice and Development

⁴ <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/11/2023-were-currently-facing-over-600-court-cases-inec-cries-out/>