



*Press release*

***Systemic failings and electoral security problems show need for serious reform***

Abuja, 11 March 2019

The European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) to Nigeria has concluded that while there were operational improvements in the governorship and State House of Assembly elections on 9 March, these were overshadowed by systemic failings, including a lack of transparency, incumbency advantage and a troubling electoral security environment. The problems demonstrate the need for an inclusive national discussion on electoral reform.

Presenting the mission's preliminary statement in Abuja, EU Chief Observer, Maria Arena, said that, on election day, polling procedures were assessed more positively by EU observers compared to the 23 February election day. However, the EU EOM condemned the violence and intimidation, including against election officials and voters, and also referred to the obstruction of citizen observers by the military and security agents on election day. Observers, including EU observers, were denied access to collation centres in Rivers.

Overall, the elections were competitive with freedom to campaign. However, there was misuse of incumbency, including on state-owned state media, which prevented a level playing field. In the two weeks leading up to the state elections, EU observers saw some misuse of state offices, as well as institutional websites being used for campaigning by both APC and PDP incumbent governors.

State-level media broadcast political debates in 21 states, giving voters the opportunity to directly compare candidates. However in 12 states, incumbents or their main challengers refused to participate. All nine state-owned radio stations monitored by the EU Election Observation Mission served the interests of incumbent governors. The mission also noted pressure on local media outlets and journalists before and on election day.

"The systemic problems evident in the 2019 electoral process show the need for an inclusive national discussion on reform for greater electoral integrity and participation," said the Chief Observer, Maria Arena.

"We echo the view of leading civil society organisations that say that there is an urgent need to restore faith in the electoral process. We encourage a national conversation on electoral reform and strongly believe that it would meaningfully contribute to Nigeria's democratic development," she added.

On election day, 73 EU observers followed opening, voting and closing processes at 223 polling units, and the collation of results at 81 centres across 22 states. Most polling units visited opened on time or less than 30 minutes late, and the procedures for the accreditation of voters were significantly improved. The counting of ballots was overall transparent. Positively, in almost all cases, party agents received copies of the results forms.

The EU EOM also presented its assessment of the collation process for the presidential and National Assembly results. It concluded that inconsistent numbers, lack of clear checks and explanations, and insufficient public information undermined confidence in the integrity of

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process. The mission emphasised the need for better training of collation staff, improved data management and, in particular, more information and explanation from INEC on this important phase of the election process.

The mission will continue to observe the collation process for the state elections, the announcement of results, as well any petitions. It will remain in Nigeria for the coming weeks. A final report, including recommendations for future elections, will be published approximately two months later.

ENDS

**Note to Editors:** The European Union was invited to deploy an election observation mission for the general elections by the Independent National Electoral Commission. The EU EOM assessed the extent to which the electoral process complied with international and regional commitments for elections, as well as with the laws of Nigeria. The EU EOM is independent of EU institutions, the Delegation of the European Union to Nigeria and EU member states.

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