

**A COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT THE END OF A NATIONAL WORKSHOP ORGANIZED BY THE
CARDINAL ONAIYEKAN FOUNDATION FOR PEACE (COFP) ON THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS
LEADERS IN PROMOTING CREDIBLE AND VIOLENCE FREE ELECTIONS IN 2019,
HELD FROM 3RD - 6TH DECEMBER, 2018 AT AJUJI GREENWICH HOTEL, ABUJA.**



Preamble

In the recent past, elections in Nigeria have been marred by violence and malpractices leading to distrust in the electoral processes. As 2019 general elections approach, the COFP, in pursuance of her mandate to provide the platform for inspiring and equipping grassroots leaders to work together genuinely in building their own solutions for social change and common humanity, organized a two day workshop for 82 Christian and Muslim religious leaders from the six Geo-Political Zones of Nigeria on the Role of Religious

Leaders in Promoting Credible and Violence Free Elections In 2019. The workshop which had in attendance dignitaries from major international development organizations including Australian High Commissioner in Nigeria, USAID Mission Director, Director FCT National Orientation Agency, FCT Deputy Commissioner of Police, among other partners. The aim of the workshop is to sensitize and educate electorates on the need to go out and cast their votes wisely and peacefully so that leaders chosen will be a representative of their choice. The workshop also urges stakeholders i.e. religious leaders, youth, women etc. to say no to all forms of violence and malpractices before, during and after the elections.

Observations

The workshop observed that the challenges facing electoral processes in Nigeria are multifaceted, and the discourse was able to highlight some of the issues as below:

1. Low voter turnout
2. Security threats
3. Poor engagement and integration of stakeholders such as religious leaders, traditional leaders, political leaders, educators, youths, women, security agencies, governmental organizations, NGOs, CSOs, FBOs, International development partners, Independent National Electoral Commission(INEC), media etc. in the conduct of violence free and credible elections.
4. Hate speech and fake news

Recommendations

Having deliberated on the issues aforementioned, the following recommendations were proffered:

1. All relevant stakeholders should ensure that electorate are properly educated on the need to exercise their civic rights and be assured that every vote counts.
2. All relevant stakeholders should ensure that campaign against all forms of electoral malpractices such as Votes and voters' card buying should be intensified while offenders are held accountable.
3. Deployment of Security personnel for elections should be intelligence based (heavy or light as necessary) and services be fair and impartial.
4. Public, Religious and Private properties should be adequately secured before, during and after elections.

5. Political campaigns should be issue based and agenda driven.
6. Religious leaders should be non-partisan and equally encourage the electorate on responsible participation while they act as role models.
7. INEC should be transparent, neutral and treat all political parties and candidates fairly and equally.
8. Youth should eschew all forms of electoral malpractices such as intimidation, impersonation, migration/stealing of electoral materials etc.
9. Media and all stakeholders should avoid the use and spread of hate speech and fake news.
10. Government should put in place timely and adequate support for the Independent National Electoral Commission.
11. Electoral processes should be made acceptable to all political parties while elections should be conducted in a safe and secure environment.
12. Religious and Traditional stakeholders should establish intra and inter-religious platforms for mediation (down to grassroot levels) before, during and after elections.
13. INEC and Political parties should ensure safe space for Women, Youth and vulnerable citizens to vote and to be voted for at all levels.

Conclusion:

As Nigeria prepares for the 2019 General Elections, it is the earnest hope of the religious leaders within this conversation that the integration and use of the aforementioned recommendations will not only strengthen the electoral processes but also encourage participation of all stakeholders such that the conduct of 2019 General Elections will be violence-free, fair, credible and transparent.

Signed:



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