

2007 Nigerian National Elections

Pre-Election Assessment Final Report



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**Report of the International Republican Institute (IRI)
International Pre-Election Assessment Delegation
for the 2007 Nigerian Elections**

I. INTRODUCTION

This report is offered by the international pre-election assessment delegation organized by the International Republican Institute (IRI) in anticipation of the 2007 national and state executive and legislative elections in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The delegation is part of IRI's long-term commitment to assist the democratic processes in Nigeria, where it has operated since 1998, monitoring the national and state elections of 1999 and 2003 and, in the inter-electoral period, working with Nigerian political parties, civil society organizations and other stakeholders which share its dedication to building the infrastructures of democracy and advancing freedom, self-government and the rule of law worldwide.

IRI's core activities in Nigeria, which are funded mainly by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), include offering hands-on training to national, state and local leadership registered political parties in grassroots skills building and political development; conflict resolution; drafting codes of conduct (as it assisted some political parties to do in the run-up to the 2003 elections); political party poll agent training; promoting women's participation in party politics; promoting issue-based political party agendas; and election observation.

The international pre-election assessment delegation was led by Ambassador Pierre-Richard Prosper, former Ambassador-at-Large, Office of War Crimes Issues, U.S. Department of State. Serving as delegates were the Honorable Frances Johnson-Morris, Minister of Justice and Attorney-General of the Republic of Liberia, who formerly served as chairperson of the National Election Commission of the same; the Honorable Harry A. Johnston II, former Member of the U.S. Congress and Special Envoy to Sudan for President Bill Clinton; the Honorable Manuel Pinto, former Member of Parliament (as well as Minister of State for Internal Affairs) of the Republic of Uganda; the Honorable Benjamin Ulenga, Member of Parliament and Leader of the Official Opposition in the Republic of Namibia; and Dr. J. Peter Pham, Director of the Nelson Institute for International and Public Affairs at James Madison University in Virginia (U.S.A.). Accompanying the delegates were Ms. Elizabeth Dugan, IRI Vice President for Programs; Ms. Stephanie Blanton, IRI Regional Program Director for Africa; and Mr. Scott Pool, IRI Program Officer for Africa; as well as Dr. Matthias Zana Naab, Resident Country Director for IRI in Nigeria.

The purpose of the pre-election mission was to observe technical preparations for the coming elections, facilitate the presence of observers who will monitor the campaign and election period in the West African country and prepare for international election observers who will be present for the voting. The delegation also assessed the political

environment and the state of preparations for the poll. This information will be used to advise IRI's partner democracy promotion organizations as well as, indirectly, other international and national organizations and governmental agencies, in planning for and understanding the election process.

The delegation emphasizes that it did not seek to reach any final conclusions on the 2007 election process since a comprehensive assessment of the electoral exercise is only possible at its conclusion when the ensemble of events and developments can be viewed as parts of a larger continuum. The objective of the delegation's work was to achieve an accurate snapshot of the actual status of preparations for the poll—technical, political and otherwise—at the time of its mission.

That being said, however, within this overall context, the pre-election period bears a particular importance. Concerns like the general political context of and climate surrounding the poll, the legal framework for the electoral exercise, how the constitutional and legislative requirements are actually implemented, the technical preparations and other mechanisms for the carrying out of the election process, the capacity and/or willingness of political actors to undertake campaigns based on substantive issues, the opportunities for cooperation with and avenues open to civil society organizations, the level of information available to and engagement of the electorate at large, and security for every stage in the process all impact the eventual judgment, both of the Nigerian people and the African continent as well as of the international community, on the democratic character, credibility and, ultimately, legitimacy of the elections scheduled for April 14 and 21, 2007.

With these points in mind and in the spirit of cooperation, the IRI pre-election assessment delegation offers the following observations and recommendations in the hope of contributing in a positive manner to the Nigerian people's exercise of their sovereign right of free self-determination.

II. THE DELEGATION AND ITS WORK OF ASSESSMENT

The delegation held a series of meetings with government officials, political party leaders, civil society organization representatives, religious authorities, members of the media, and other Nigerian stakeholders in the electoral process as well as foreign diplomats and representatives of international intergovernmental, governmental and nongovernmental agencies. The delegation expresses its deepest gratitude to all those who met with it to share their perspectives and is very appreciative of their frankness which it believes comes out of both their concern and hopes for the Nigerian nation.

The delegation as a whole met with the following authorities from the national government of Nigeria: the Right Honorable Aminu Bello Masari, Speaker of the House of Representatives, who was joined by the Honorable Abdul A. Ningi, Leader of the House, and several Members of the House; the Right Honorable Salihu Modibo Alfa Belgore, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Nigeria, who was joined by several Honorable Justices of the Court as well as the Honorable Administrator of the National Judicial Service and the Chief Registrar of the Supreme Court; Professor Maurice M. Iwu, Chairman of the Independent National Election Commission (INEC), who was accompanied by two commissioners; Mr. Sunday Gabriel Ehindero, Inspector-General of the Nigerian Police Force, who was accompanied by six of the Deputy Inspectors-General.

The delegation was able to meet with representatives of other diplomatic missions accredited to the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The delegation also met with representatives of governors as well as members of the media and leaders of civil society organizations and social activists and representatives of religious organizations.

The delegation was also briefed by leaders and representatives of a wide range of registered political parties, although it regrets that no officials of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) were available to meet with it during its stay in the Federal Capital Territory due to the dispersal of members of the national party leadership to attend the state primaries ongoing at the time of the pre-election assessment.

Meetings were sought and/or scheduled with a number of other officials but did not take place, including encounters with His Excellency Olusegun Obasanjo, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria; His Excellency the President of the Senate the Right Honorable Ken Nnamani; and the Honorable Minister of Foreign Affairs Professor Joy Ogwu. Due to the many demands upon these public figures, the delegation draws no conclusions from its inability to meet with them.

The delegation was also able to attend a plenary hearing before the House of Representatives, presided over by the Right Honorable Speaker and held under the auspices of that legislative body's Committee on Electoral Matters chaired by the Honorable Hamisu Mu'azu Shira, at which INEC Chairman Iwu testified.

In addition to the delegation's meetings, which took place from November 27 through December 1, 2006, its members had available as a resource the document *IRI First Tier Pre-Election Assessment in Nigeria—A National Report*, prepared by a ten-person team of assessors drawn from civil society practitioners and academia who conducted field research in order to gauge the political environment, levels of preparedness and the state of security regarding the 2007 national elections in nine targeted states in all six geopolitical zones of the Federation during the period of October 16-27, 2006. Two of the researchers who prepared this report, Dr. Oka Obono of the University of Ibadan and Dr. Ataoto Igirgi of the Benue State University, briefed the delegation on their findings.

III. THE CONTEXT OF THE 2007 ELECTIONS

With its estimated population standing at a generally estimated 130 million, the largest in Africa; its vast proven petroleum and other hydrocarbon reserves the greatest in Africa and the eighth largest in the world; its political and military contributions to United Nations (UN), African Union (AU) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) peace and security operations of great significance; and its leading role in the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and its Peer-Review Mechanism, Nigeria is without a doubt one of the most strategically important states on the African continent, one that others look to for leadership. In the words of INEC Chairman Iwu to the delegation, "Whatever happens in Nigeria touches the rest of the world."

The Nigerian nation now stands at a historical crossroads. After long episodes of military rule, since 1999 the country has enjoyed its longest continuous period of civilian authority. While there have been controversies and difficulties during the two terms of President Olusegun Obasanjo, including the sapping debate on a possible constitutional amendment that would allow incumbent presidents and governors to seek a third term which consumed much of the nation's political attention and energy through the first half of 2006 (and which continues to haunt the political discourse of the country), Nigeria has benefited from a number of notable policy successes, including a historical debt relief concession from the Paris Club that wipes out some \$30 billion of the country's \$37 billion external debt. The government of Nigeria has also taken steps to fight the endemic culture of corruption that has long plagued the country's political, economic and social development. The federal Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), established in 2004, has been charged with investigating, prosecuting and punishing economic and financial offenses and other related corruption, although some have criticized its enforcement as arbitrary and politically motivated. During the delegation's visit, for example, a High Court sitting in Lagos quashed legal moves by the EFCC against Vice President Atiku Abubakar which would have placed a hurdle in his run for the presidency, but the anti-corruption agency is appealing the ruling.

Nevertheless the cynicism and distrust of the political system that corruption has bred is such that many say, "The best people have fled politics while the worst are in it." This mental attitude makes fertile ground for all manner of "conspiracy theory," both factually grounded and not, in the tense electoral dynamic.

It is in this context the Nigerian electoral exercises, now set for April 14 and 21, 2007, for the state and national elections respectively, take on an immense importance. If a democratically-elected civilian president can hand over power to another, not only will it be a singular feat in Nigeria's history as an independent state and an important consolidation of the nation's nascent democracy, it will also represent a significant contribution to regional stability and international security as well as democracy worldwide.

There is no denying that the repeated military interventions in the constitutional history of Nigeria have had a cumulative corrosive effect on both the democratic culture as well as the overall political economy of the country, often resulting in weak political institutions and rampant public and private sector corruption, resulting in poor economic performance and decreased governance and other social capacity. The return to civilian rule following the 1999 elections was only the beginning of a process of democratization and capacity building. It is to be appreciated that the 1998-1999 electoral process—as well as the underlying constitutional framework—was far from ideal but there was a broad consensus in Nigerian society that such defects had to be accepted within this context with the understanding that they were the price of returning the soldiers to the barracks and that they would be overcome over time through a transparent reform process. Thus expectations were rather high in the lead-up to the 2003 elections, which were viewed as a further step forward. Unfortunately, while the results of the latter poll were ultimately accepted (albeit very grudgingly in some quarters), the disappointment over many of the problems which characterized the poll—including, *inter alia*, the multiple cases of delays, flawed procedures, political violence and questionably tabulated results—have given rise to cynicism and a broad decrease in confidence on the part of the general population, especially the more educated classes, in the Nigerian electoral system if not in the will of the political establishment to respect the sovereign decision of the people. Thus it is even more important that the current electoral process be credibly shown to indeed be free and fair.

However, the delegation found that the political climate in Nigeria today, while relatively open in comparison to many other societies making transitions toward greater democracy, is very tense. While the overwhelming consensus among the delegation's interlocutors—shared by the delegates themselves—is that elections must be held as scheduled and a transition must take place on the constitutionally-mandated date of May 29, 2007, there remains doubt on the part of a not insignificant number as to whether there truly exists a political will to actually have free and fair elections which are credibly carried out. Furthermore, even if assuming that the quasi-unanimous declarations of support for the poll on the part of political figures are indeed manifestations of the requisite will, the question remains whether Nigeria is prepared or can be reasonably expected to become prepared to actually carry out the exercise in a credible manner. Finally, even assuming both these presuppositions, serious concerns relating to security remain unanswered. In fact, enough reports of violence and fear in the current intra-party primary campaigns do not augur well for the general election campaign that is only now beginning.

IV. SPECIFIC OBSERVATIONS OF THE DELEGATION

General Election Administration. Under Nigerian law, the conduct of the electoral exercise is entrusted to INEC, composed of 12 commissioners led by a chairman, which also oversees the work of the subsidiary State Independent Election Commissions (SIEC) in each of Nigeria's 36 states and the Federal Capital District. Although the chairman of INEC assured the delegation that his agency is fully funded with a budget allocation of 42 billion naira (approximately \$330 million), half of which has been released, this information has been questioned by both members of the international community in Nigeria and representatives of political parties and other local stakeholders.

The voting is scheduled to take place in 120,000 polling places, each designed to accommodate no more than 500 voters, throughout Nigeria. These numbers are based upon the modeling use of a population of 120 million, half of whom would be eligible voters. However, since the voter registration exercise (see below) has only begun and no census data will be released before the election date (officially cited for reasons of security), it is presently not possible to assess the adequacy of this provision.

At the very least, there is a perception on the part of many stakeholders of the incompetence if not willful malfeasance on the part of INEC in general and its chairman in particular that needs to be dispelled if the electoral body is able to garner enough trust to carry out its assigned task.

Voter Registration. The delegation is very concerned with the voter registration process. Under the terms of the Electoral Act of 2006, INEC is charged with compiling a National Register of Voters "which shall include the names of all persons entitled to vote in any Federal, State or Local Government/Area Council Elections," individualized to each polling place. By statute, the "registration of voters, updating and revision of the register of voters...shall stop not later than 120 days before any election," that is December 14, 2006, for the 2007 elections (the delegation's visit occurred two weeks before this date). Challenges to the register and other amendments may be made up to 60 days before the election—in the case of the present exercise, February 14, 2007—after which the voter roll must be closed and the final register made available to the public. The delegation notes that the language of the statute closes registration for the election on December 14, even if amendments may be made up to a later date.

However, due to a lack of the "direct data capture" (DDC) machines used for voter registration, numbers reported to the delegation varied widely, and perhaps as few as 3.5 million voters had been registered at the time of the delegation's mission. According to the INEC Chairman, the Commission had taken delivery of only 15,000 units of the machines (a figure strongly disputed by both other government officials and civil society representatives), but this number nonetheless falls far short of the targeted 33,000 expected to be necessary to complete voter registration. The delegation finds it worrisome that even if all the projected number of DDC units were available at the time of its visit, it would still be very difficult to register the number of potential eligible

voters within the limits prescribed by law. In Imo State, for example, at the time of the delegation's visit, only 82 of the 880 machines required had been delivered. In Lagos, for another example, while a number of machines had been delivered, there were firsthand reports of their being "hijacked" or "monopolized" by individuals with partisan interests.

The delegation's concern is accentuated by the virtual absence even in the Federal Capital Territory of any visible registration activity as well as questions raised by both political parties and civil society organizations that the registration process is being manipulated for partisan gain (the more benign interpretation) or even (in some more conspiratorial interpretations) intentionally set up to fail in order to justify a postponement of the poll itself. The delegates noted that out of all the individuals whom they interviewed, only one nongovernmental official had actually registered.

The delegation observes that, relying on INEC's own estimate of 60 million eligible voters and its interpretation that it has until February 14, 2007, to finalize and publish the final voter registry, this would mean even with all DDC units in place and ongoing registration, the Commission would have to register approximately one million individuals per day beginning immediately. The delegation notes that the production of a creditable National Register of Voters that neither disenfranchises significant numbers of individual persons in the aggregate nor specific regions or interest groups is the condition *sine qua non* for a minimally free and fair electoral process. It, however, emphasizes that the same production must be firmly established on a legal basis.

At the time of the conclusion of the delegation's stay in Nigeria, INEC had announced that it would use the register from the 2003 election as the basis for a register of voters for the 2007 election. However, interlocutors questioned both the actual availability of this database and its reliability (one well-placed observer noted that the previous voter roll was widely acknowledged to contain between 10 and 20 million fraudulent registrations). Furthermore, the legality of recourse to the older register was debated by several of those interviewed by the delegation.

Voter Education and Information. While the populace appears to be very interested in the election process, there seems to be a general dearth of information concerning the most basic practical elements. For example, while potential voters have been informed via broadcast and print media as well as other outlets, including announcements in houses of worship, of the need to register, they have almost no information on when and where to actually go about doing so. In its entire stay in the Federal Capital Territory, the delegation did not see one poster with the relevant information and saw only one piece of visual advertisement for the exercise, ironically a billboard on the road to Abuja's international airport far from the city center.

Media. There is freedom of the press in Nigeria and the country is fortunate, especially in the print media, to have a wide breadth of editorial perspective, including many voices which are highly critical of the incumbent administration. On the other hand, in a

fiercely competitive environment, some print journalists have adapted a very sensationalistic style which some critics would describe as irresponsible and which could, in the wrong circumstances, fan tensions. There are also sporadic reports of denial of print media access, especially at state and local levels, targeted against certain political candidates who allege that their paid messages have been refused by some media outlets.

Furthermore, while even other journalists concede that the national broadcasters have tried to give “fair and balanced” coverage of the issues and candidates, the credibility level of state and local broadcast media is very low. A number of journalists expressed to the delegation their view that state and local broadcasters are little more than partisan propagandists since they are controlled by the powerful governors of the states in which they are located.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, it should be acknowledged that a great deal of self-censorship is also exercised by certain members of the media. For example, the state-owned NTA network is accused of not adequately reporting recent episodes of election-related violence, although its representative explained that his organization “did not want to interfere with ongoing investigations.”

It should be noted that while Nigeria’s electoral legislation stipulates that “equal airtime shall be allotted to all political parties during prime times at similar hours each day,” this provision is neither applicable to the intra-party primaries and, with respect to the general elections, is “subject to the payment of appropriate fees” by the interested parties and their candidates.

Political Parties. Liberalization of party registration procedures, both by legislation and by administrative practices initiated by INEC, has made the launch of political parties considerably easier than before. From the starting point of three political parties registered at the time of the return to civilian rule in 1999, there are now more than 50 registered political parties contesting the 2007 elections with almost bewildering constellations of regional and national alliances between them.

On the other hand, with the exception of the ruling PDP and possibly one or two other organizations, most of Nigeria’s political parties are relatively weak. While their representatives complain of an “uneven playing field” (Nigerian legislation more or less allocates public support for political parties on the basis of votes received in the previous round of general elections which, in the present case, gives the PDP with its approximately three-quarters of the national legislative seats a considerable advantage), it is also true that, objectively speaking, little distinguishes the competing parties other than personalities. The party platforms examined by the delegation were remarkably similar with little to differentiate their authors in terms of actual policies. For example, several agreed on the “central role of tertiary education in national development” and the need to “provide adequate funds” for universities, but none spelled out the modalities for achieving this priority.

There is also the question of the primaries or other candidate selection mechanisms within the political parties which have not always been especially transparent. The process has also been marred by violence in some states and, even without the physical conflict, may also poison the political climate over the next few months as incumbents who lose may seek to retaliate through the political process which they control at least through May 2007.

The delegation notes with great encouragement the recent decision by several of the political parties to draft and sign on to a code of conduct for the election.

Civil Society and Other Actors in the Political Process. The strongest Nigerian civil society organizations have been those focused on fighting corruption and other abuses in specific circumstances and, consequently, they have generally taken on an oppositional character. According to more than one international donor representative, civil society groups have only recently been “roped into” the electoral process with the incentive of funding opportunities. While they are vocal advocates, their capacity remains weak. There is no nationwide umbrella organization and, consequently, there is neither a code of conduct nor coordination between this sector and authorities like INEC. PACT is supporting the creation of an Alliance for Credible Elections (ACE), but it was only beginning its activities at the time of the delegation’s visit.

In addition, there are disputes over both terminology and accountability in the nongovernmental organization (NGO) sector. A number of interlocutors told the delegation that some NGOs were little better than fronts for political interests (perhaps more analogous to political action committees than civil society organizations), while others were not themselves immune from corruption.

For their part, civil society groups complain of lack of funding, a concern verified by the delegation which learned that the “donor basket” of assistance from the European Union and other intergovernmental and governmental partners (except USAID)—approximately \$30 million being budgeted for the pre-election period—has not yet been released to any of the applicant organizations.

The delegation found its conversations with leaders representing a broad spectrum of religious faiths more heartening, especially considering the deep religious faith of many Nigerians and the access religious leaders have to the grassroots. The delegates were gratified to find here a strong will for both peace and democratic and transparent government although they wish that there were greater efforts on the part of both the government and Nigeria’s international partners to engage this significant sector at this critical moment in the country’s historical development.

Women in the Political Process. The 1991 census puts the Nigerian female population at approximately 49.7 percent of the total population, providing a strong foundation from which women can assert a positive role in the political process. This strength should translate into involvement in political and policy decision-making within Nigeria.

Constitutionally, women have the same rights drawn from Chapter IV of the 1999 Constitution with regard to the right of freedom of expression and association, thereby providing them the legal basis from which to participate fully in all aspects of Nigerian political discourse.

The delegation had the opportunity to meet with a number of women representing political parties and groups for professional women as well as women's advocacy groups properly speaking. While the existence of these organizations and the discussions with their very articulate spokespersons heartened the delegation, the delegates also noted the need to increase the number of women involved in the electoral process.

Security for the Elections. The delegation heard from virtually all stakeholders and other observers of the Nigerian election process that security is a major concern in these elections. There are some reports that the security forces have served political ends. There was not only widespread concern at the time of the delegation's mission of intra-party violence as rivals seek their respective party nominations, but also worry that once the primary process was complete this would simply shift to inter-party violence. Information was received that cutlasses as well as firearms were being stockpiled. Security officials confirmed reports from others that many candidates were gathering gangs of "area boys" around them with both defensive and aggressive intent. One candidate told the delegation that if his supporters suffered "violence" through fraudulent tabulation they would "defend themselves with whatever means they have." During the delegation's sojourn in Nigeria, the political offices of one Delta State candidate for the House of Representatives were bombed. As one observer asked the delegation, "If these types of things happen during the primaries, what do you think will happen during the general elections?" Knowing the history of past violence surrounding electoral exercises in Nigeria, the delegation is very concerned when it hears, as it did from one interlocutor, reference to the upcoming poll as "preparations for war."

For the elections themselves, the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) plans to deploy approximately two-thirds of its overall manpower capacity, 220,000 out of 330,000 officers. According to the Inspector-General of the NPF, arrangements are also being made to plan for contingencies as well as cooperation with "sister services" of the police. On the other hand, some political actors complained to the delegation about the use of large numbers of personal state security services as escorts to some political candidates, alleging that they represented *de facto* endorsement if not intimidation.

Unquestionably, security is a key component of ensuring free and fair elections in April 2007. The absence of adequate security in conjunction with inadequate electoral transparency could well lead to increased violence upon the conclusion of the election.

Resolution of Eventual Election Disputes. Under the law, disputes regarding elections for state governors and federal legislators are heard by an *ad hoc* seven-judge tribunal appointed by the president of the Court of Appeal having territorial jurisdiction over the constituency in question. Appeals from this tribunal go to the Court of Appeal. Disputes

regarding the presidential (and vice-presidential) election begin at the Court of Appeal with the Supreme Court serving as the appellate body. While the delegation was assured by the highest judicial authorities that they were prepared to deal with these eventualities, the fact that in one recent example, Anambra State, the judiciary did not resolve the disputed gubernatorial election of 2003 until this year does not lend great confidence in this regard.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recognizing that no democratic experience ever achieves the ideal and that all electoral processes can and should be improved as well as acknowledging the progress that Nigeria has made since the return to civilian constitutional government, the International Republican Institute pre-election assessment delegation offers the following recommendations:

The President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria

- President Obasanjo needs to make a clear, unambiguous reaffirmation of his commitment to free and fair elections as scheduled in April 2007, followed by a peaceful and orderly constitutional handover to his democratically-elected successor in May 2007. Rumors and conspiracy theories concerning the incumbent administration's intentions towards the April elections continue to circulate, undermining public confidence in the electoral process. President Obasanjo can quell these rumors by putting forth an appropriate declaration affirming his support for Nigeria's Constitutional process.
- The President needs to support INEC's fulfillment of its legal mandate and ensure that it receives the political encouragement and resources necessary to carry out its functions in a timely manner.
- The President should act expeditiously and collaboratively with the National Assembly in moving forward such legal remedies as may become necessary to ensure the lawful status of Nigeria's electoral system.
- As Commander-in-Chief of Nigeria's Armed Forces, the President should take concrete steps to ensure the neutrality of security forces during the election period, as well as provide the resources to protect voters and candidates alike.

The Independent National Election Commission (INEC)

- INEC must improve its voter education and public information efforts to educate voters on the electoral process and their individual rights and responsibilities during the period leading up to and including the elections.
- INEC needs to be more forthcoming with information it has on the actual state of the voter registration process in order to dispel misperceptions on the part of other stakeholders or, as the case may be, allow them to openly discuss alternative solutions to both voter registration and voting challenges.

- INEC should also broaden its outreach to potential partners, especially in civil society organizations and religious groups. In particular, INEC is encouraged to shift its often seemingly confrontational nature to one of collaboration and cooperation with all key stakeholders in the electoral process.
- INEC must proactively maintain and ensure that the electoral process is transparent to Nigerian voters and international observers if it is to maintain its credibility as an independent election arbiter.

The National Assembly

- The delegation commends the National Assembly, especially the House of Representatives, for the seriousness with which it has carried out its oversight function of the electoral process in general and INEC in particular. Legislators should continue to play this important oversight role by establishing the necessary regulatory framework and policies for the conduct of credible elections in 2007.
- The National Assembly and other relevant bodies need to be prepared to act quickly on legislative amendments that may prove necessary to provide a legal basis for the elections to proceed in a free, fair and credible manner. This includes but is not limited to amending statutory language to pre-empt challenges to what will likely be the ongoing registration of voters for the April 2007 polls by INEC after the December 14, 2006, deadline, in violation of current electoral law.
- The National Assembly should reach out to civil society groups and others as it exercises its oversight function and, to the extent appropriate, engage with these actors in the crafting of such legal remedies as they become necessary to ensure the lawful conduct of the scheduled elections and the widest possible participation of Nigerians.
- The National Assembly should properly document shortcomings in the Electoral Act of 2006 as well as evaluate their oversight capacity in order for the next Assembly to further strengthen the Electoral Act.

The Judiciary

- Acting within their administrative prerogatives, the Supreme Court of Nigeria and the National Judicial Council should provide in advance procedural guidelines by which electoral disputes can and will be expeditiously adjudicated in concordance with the law.

The Security Services

- The Nigerian Police Force and other security services should continue their efforts to establish comprehensive and practical measures, including further training on their neutral role in the electoral process, to provide for the safe conduct of the electoral exercise through all its stages, not just the actual election days.
- In the discharge of their duties, security services must not interfere in the balloting procedures on Election Day, but should ensure that voters feel safe to exercise their rights and civic responsibility through the ballot box. The security services should be reminded of the need to impartially protect lives and property in an apolitical manner.

Political Parties and Candidates

- Political parties are strongly urged to complete and implement at the earliest date possible a code of conduct for the electoral campaign. They should also educate their membership on the provisions of that code. Parties must agree and adhere to a code of conduct that rejects politically-motivated violence.
- Parties are likewise encouraged to conduct their primaries and other candidate selection processes in a fair, transparent and peaceful manner.
- Parties should distinguish themselves from each other based on substantive issues of concern to voters rather than the personalities of their leaders. Parties are encouraged to seek to improve their understanding of voter concerns, address those concerns, and adopt responsive policies into their party platforms and manifestos.
- Parties should refrain from all acts of violence and inflammatory rhetoric and should discipline those candidates, representatives or members who encourage or participate in such activities.
- Political parties should ensure that women have equal access to party membership and leadership opportunities within party organizations and active steps need to be taken to eliminate existing double standards based on gender.

To this end, political parties are encouraged to examine party structures and procedures to remove barriers that directly or indirectly discriminate against the participation of women in politics.

Civil Society Organizations

- Civil society organizations should take advantage of their capabilities to help educate and inform voters on the mechanics and importance of registering to vote and on the significance of the elections to the consolidation of Nigeria's young democracy.
- Civil society organizations also need to actively engage in exercising their "watchdog function" and work to hold politicians and political institutions accountable during the electoral process.

The Media

- The media is encouraged to continue its vigorous free debate, while tempering passionate reporting with the need to respect the truth and adhere to international standards of journalistic integrity. Media outlets should act in a non-partisan manner and remember their responsibility to provide the most accurate unbiased information to the Nigerian electorate.
- To this end, media outlets must take seriously the need to avoid inflaming already tense situations with unbalanced, biased or partisan reporting.

Religious Leaders

- Religious leaders are to be commended for their leadership and encouraged to continue to educate their adherents and urge them to actively participate in the electoral process in a peaceful manner.
- Religious leaders are equally encouraged to support faith-based organizations to conduct civic and voter education and election monitoring activities.

Nigeria's International Partners

- International donor groups should, to the extent possible, immediately make funding available to qualified groups promoting a free, fair and sound electoral process, if the funds are to achieve maximum effect.
- International donors need to not only coordinate their efforts but also support their Nigerian partners as appropriate to ensure that their capacities are strengthened during this current electoral cycle and beyond.
- Governments as well as international and regional organizations are encouraged to remain actively engaged with the government of Nigeria and to use their influence to encourage the incumbent administration to

strengthen Nigerian democracy allowing for a peaceful transition of power on schedule in May 2007 and building a legacy of constitutional transition. They should also emphasize that the respect for the rule of law and universal standards of justice are prerequisites for recognition continued good standing in the international community.

VI. CONCLUSION

The International Republican Institute international pre-election delegation is grateful to the staff of IRI for their hard work which made possible its mission. The delegation also wishes to acknowledge the hospitality and openness of all those with whom it visited in Nigeria. The mutual sharing was essential to the success of this pre-election assessment. The delegation reiterates the support of its members and of IRI for free, fair and credible elections in Nigeria in April 2007 and their commitment to doing whatever possible and appropriate to continue assisting the Nigerian people in building their country and its democratic institutions.