Introduction

Ladies and Gentlemen, it gives us great pleasure to welcome you to YIAGA AFRICA Watching The Vote (WTV) Statement on the conduct of the Governorship and Kogi West Senatorial District election. YIAGA AFRICA deployed a total of 548 observers for the Kogi elections with 500 polling unit observers deployed to 250 sampled polling units. Polling unit observers provided reports on the conduct of the election day process from the opening of polls to the posting of results at the polling unit level. The YIAGA AFRICA WTV Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) data revealed that INEC officials had arrived at 52% of the sampled polling units by 7:30 am, with accreditation and voting commencing in 79% of the sampled polling units by 9am and essential electoral materials like the smart card reader present in 98% of polling units. While the PVT data demonstrated the commencement of polls in the state, the situational analysis of the process highlighted major infractions that had significantly impacted the credibility of the process.

This statement on the conduct of the elections is based on YIAGA AFRICA WTV observation of the processes of accreditation, voting, and the counting and posting of results. This statement represents a culmination of our findings from the pre-election environment through election day and highlights critical incidents observed that threaten the credibility of the elections.

YIAGA AFRICA’s WTV is “Driven by Data – For All Nigerians – Beholden to None!”. Employing the PVT methodology – the gold standard for citizen observation – WTV deployed 500 stationary observers in pairs to a representative statistical sample of 250 polling units, and 27 mobile observers located in all 21 local government areas (LGAs) of Kogi state. WTV also deployed 21 collation center observers to each of the LGA collation centres.

YIAGA AFRICA implemented its WTV observation to provide citizens, candidates, political parties and INEC with independent, accurate and timely information that reflects the ballots cast at polling units for the Kogi governorship election and Kogi West senatorial election.
Pre-election Observation Findings

In line with YIAGA AFRICA’s commitment to electoral integrity through citizen oversight of the electoral process, WTV deployed a pre-election observation (PREO) mission in Kogi in all 21 LGAs over a period of eight weeks. The YIAGA AFRICA WTV PREO highlights certain findings that are consistent with emerging trends that threaten the conduct of a peaceful and credible election in Kogi. Major findings highlighted include:

1. **Political Campaigns and Rallies Marred by Violence:** Political campaigns and rallies in Kogi were marred with brigandage, assault and violence. Observers reported violent physical attacks at rallies/meetings or campaign events across the LGAs with specific reports of intimidation of candidates/supporters in Ankpa, Dekina, Idah and Ofu LGAs.

2. **Stockpiling of Small and light weapons and recruitment of political thugs:** YIAGA AFRICA highlighted the worrisome trend of easy access and stockpile of small arms and light weapons and the active recruitment of thugs in the state. YIAGA AFRICA expressed concern about the possible impact of this stockpiling and recruitment on the conduct of peaceful elections in the state, especially given the lack of response by security agencies before the elections.

3. **Money Politics and Abuse of Electoral Laws:** The PREO findings indicated a trend of voter inducement, including the purchase of Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) and voter information details. YIAGA AFRICA WTV observed political parties moving from house to house in places like Ankpa LGA to document names, polling unit numbers and addresses of citizens with PVCs, offering advance payments of five hundred naira (N500) and gift items such as vehicles in several communities ahead of the election. The campaigns were a contest between the highest bidders and this trend projected a possible overbearing influence of money in the election, vote buying, community collusion and electoral thugs bargaining.

4. **Election management:** While the pre-election report indicated early commencement of activities by INEC, early and effective deployment of materials and personnel was a major concern in the pre-election phase. YIAGA AFRICA findings revealed reasonable compliance of INEC with the election timetable as indicated in its conduct of preparatory activities such as recruitment and training of ad-hoc staff, stakeholder engagements and voter education amongst others, in preparations for the November 16 polls. Of important note, is the role the courts played in the election, especially with the last-minute judgements that impacted on election operations and logistics management. The conflicting nature of those
judgments delivered by courts of coordinate jurisdiction complicated INEC’s preparations for the elections.

**Summary of Election Day Findings**

On election day, YIAGA AFRICA received and confirmed a total of 69 incident reports from its WTV observers. Critical incident reports capture instances that could undermine the integrity of the electoral process. Majority of the incidents observed on election day include: snatching or stuffing of ballot boxes, violence, vote buying/bribery and accreditation of people without using card readers.

The most serious of the critical incidents reported include;

1. **Intimidation or harassment of voters and polling officials:** YIAGA AFRICA recorded intimidation and harassment of voters, observers and polling officials by unknown armed men and party agents of some identified political parties. These cases were reported in: PU 017 Ward 12 and PU 027, Ayingba Etiaga Ward Dekina LGA, PU 001 Ward C Lokoja LGA, Ojuwo Junction Market Square, Ankpa; Lokoja (PU 001, Ward C), Ofu (PU 005, Ugwalawo ward), Ankpa (Ojokwu ward 3) and Igalamela/Odolu (PU 022, ward 08) LGA. WTV observers were beaten and their observation checklists destroyed. and, then the process, degenerated to sporadic shooting in PU 027, Ayingba Etiaga, Dekina LGA. YIAGA AFRICA also received reports of intimidation of journalists and election observer groups like Inclusive Friends, Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room and Search for Common Ground in the full glare of security agencies who made no effort to forestall or reprimand the political thugs.

2. **Ballot box snatching/stuffing:** Election infraction, including snatching and stuffing of ballot boxes and papers were reported and confirmed in:  PU 006 Anyigba ward, Dekina LGA, ASUTA WARD, AYETORO GBEDE UNIT II HIGH COURT PU, 005, Odolu Ajaka ward 1, 22/08/07/015, Oganaji LGEA Primary School, Anyigba Dekina, PU 008 (WTV Sampled PU) OLAMABORO WARD 3 CEREMONIAL SQUARE, PU 003 Ukwo Ward 01 OLUBUN PU, ASUTA WARD, PU 003, Obaji Ward 1, Kogi K. K LGA, PU001, Ejule/Alla Ward, Ofu LGA, PU001, Ogaki Ward 06, PU-002, Aiyetoro Gbede, PU-003,Ilemo Mopamuro, PU-004, Lokoja

3. **Voter Suppression:** YIAGA AFRICA received reports on vote suppression manifested in the form of denying voters access to polling units by political thugs. This was prevalent in: At Aluaja, Iyano Ward in Ibaji LGA, Lagazi/Fam Center ward which has about 5 Polling units situated closely, LEA Primary Atsagba and Central
4. **Accreditation of people without using Card Reader:** Aiyekpele 1 and 2. PU 022/08/08/002. Aipkele 1 and 2 Open space, Ajaka Ward 2 Igalamela/Odolu, AT THE PU ATI-AJA, 2, PU 027 AYINGBA, Barrak 2 PU 002, Adumudume Dekina, GRA CML Primary school, Anyigba Dekina, PU 009 IN ANYINGBA COMMERCIAL SECONDARY SCHOOL, PU 004, Ugwolawo Ward 1, 05, PU 005 Ward-Dereguy, Ganadga Ajaokuta, PU 005 Ugwulawo Ward 10, Ofu LGA, SAMPLED P.U, Ward-Odo Egbe 2 PU-005,Egbe Yagba West

5. **Violence and Attack on Observer Groups.** WTV observers were unable to observe election day processes due to issues of violence in or near the polling units in Dekina, Ankpa, Okene, Lokoja and Ibaji LGAs.

6. **Voter Inducement and Vote buying:** reports on voter inducement and vote buying were observed across the LGAs. Specifically, YIAGA AFRICA received reports of voter inducement and vote buying in Adavi (PU 001 Afinorere ward), Ankpa (PU 010, Ward 01), Ibaji (PU 007, Itale Iyano ward), Idah (PU 001, Ugwoda ward), Yagba East (PU 01, ward 08), Kogi K.K (PU 005, Ukwu ward) and Ajaokuta (PU 005, Deregu ward) LGA. Voters were paid as much as N5,000 in some cases in exchange for their votes. At Aluaja, Iyano Ward in Ibaji LGA, INEC officials were given N15,000 and Security agents N50,00 to compromise the process.

The critical incidents reported highlight some of the key challenges associated with the conduct of Kogi 2019 governorship and senatorial election.

**Findings on the Election Process**

In our earlier statement on election day, YIAGA AFRICA observed that security officials and election day materials deployed late, resulting in polling units opening late. As at 7:30 am, YIAGA AFRICA WTV observers reported that INEC officials had arrived at 52% of polling units.

In addition, YIAGA AFRICA condemned the violence and brigandage in some polling units resulting in disruption of voting. YIAGA AFRICA called on INEC to cancel elections in those polling units where there were cases of snatching of ballot papers/boxes, violence, and disruption of the polling.
In the spirit of transparency, YIAGA AFRICA called on INEC to make public the list of polling units where elections are canceled. YIAGA also called on security agencies to ensure adequate security was provided to voters and INEC in order to complete the process of voting, results collation and declaration.

**Accreditation and Voting Processes**

YIAGA AFRICA observed accreditation, voting, and counting at polling units in all 21 LGAs. YIAGA AFRICA’s updated findings are based on reports from 233 of 250 sampled polling units.

- At 83% of polling units the card reader functioned throughout the day.
- At 91% of polling units every potential voter’s fingers were checked for indelible ink before being permitted to vote.
- At 92% of polling units every potential voter’s permanent voter card (PVC) was checked by the card reader. At 95% of polling units every potential voter’s PVC was checked against the register of voters. At 97% of polling units no one was accredited to vote who did not have a PVC.
- At 92% of polling units every potential voter’s fingerprints were checked by the card reader.
- 91% of polling units the voting cubicles were set up so no one could see how the voters marked their ballot papers. However, at 15% of polling units it was possible to see how a voter’s ballot paper was marked when it was put in the ballot box.
- At 98% of polling units indelible ink was applied to the cuticle of a finger of every accredited voter.
- During accreditation and voting, at 17% of polling units voters crowded the polling officials, at 11% of polling units there were attempts by people to influence the polling officials,
- 25% of polling units completed accreditation and voting by the designated time of 2:00pm while by 3:00pm 79% of polling units had completed accreditation and voting.

**Counting**

- At 97% of polling units polling officials showed how every ballot paper was marked to everyone present.
• At 94% of polling units an APC polling agent signed the official results form (EC.8A).

• At 83% of polling units a PDP polling agent signed the official results form (EC.8A).

• At 47% of polling units a SDP polling agent signed the official results form (EC.8A).

• At 9% of polling units polling official recounted the ballot papers.

• At 89% of polling units the official results were posted for the public to see.

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen of the press, YIAGA AFRICA data, based on two months of reports from our citizen observers, exposes serious shortcomings in the pre-election period, the election day environment and, to a lesser extent, in the conduct of the polls themselves. These issues seriously compromise the credibility of the Kogi gubernatorial and senatorial polls.

While we recognize it is the sole responsibility of INEC to conduct elections and ensure their credibility and acceptability, it is important to state clearly that there are other stakeholders whose roles are equally important in determining the credibility of elections - security agencies, political parties and their related recruits and candidates. To a great extent, the attitudes, actions and dispositions of these stakeholders could make or mar the credibility of any election.

On this particular election, while we believe, there has been significant improvement in the conduct of elections in the country, especially in INEC’s conduct and processes, we note some drawbacks in election logistics management, quality of election personnel; integrity and transparency of the results collation. The challenges in Kogi 2019 governorship elections equally lies on the role and failures of security agencies, the police in particular, political parties, the major candidates and their state and non-state accomplices. These stakeholders deliberately worked to undermine the election. They appeared to be more concerned about electoral victory than the credibility and legitimacy of the process. The unacceptable vote procurement (vote buying) and violence perpetrated by the systematically recruited and prepared party officials and thugs were carried out in the full glare of nonchalant security officials. They acted helplessly as if they were under instruction not to respond to the situation, if not already prepared to support the brigandage.
Political parties failed to contest these elections according to democratic rules of the game and instead vied for elected office based on buying votes rather than speaking to issues, manipulating the courts for political advantage, and compromising the political environment to prevent political competition. While it is political parties that have undermined the pre-election and election day environment thereby undermining the fundamental rights of voters of Kogi state to fully and freely participate in all aspects of the electoral process, it is the security agencies that have failed to maintain public order and to bring to book those responsible for electoral offenses and it is the courts that have entertained the shenanigans of political party petitions designed only to limit political competition. While INEC, like the people of Kogi state, is itself a victim of the actions of political parties, the security agencies and the courts, once again INEC failed to put in place sufficient safeguards and operational practices to ensure the elections could be conducted despite these perennial challenges.

These elections took place against the backdrop of the 2019 general elections, those elections did not meet the expectations of many Nigerians and were a missed opportunity to enhance public confidence in the country’s electoral institutions. Kogi governorship and senatorial elections, as well as the Bayelsa gubernatorial election held on the same day, provided an opportunity of all election stakeholders to change Nigeria’s electoral trajectory.

Instead, the people of Kogi have not been given the opportunity to fully exercise their right to vote. As a result, the results of these elections, regardless of the outcome cannot be said to reflect the preferences of voters in Kogi. In such a circumstance, YIAGA AFRICA calls upon INEC to conduct a thorough investigation of the conduct of the Kogi governorship and senatorial elections and to conduct a new election that gives voters a genuine opportunity to exercise their right to vote. Perpetrators of violence and their sponsors should be arrested and prosecuted. Consistent with our own protocols and international best practice, YIAGA AFRICA will not release its PVT results data as the PVT estimates cannot reflect the preferences of Kogi voters because the political parties, security agencies and the courts compromised the credibility of the Kogi governorship and senatorial elections.

We are deeply worried and concerned about this emerging trend in electoral manipulation and the deepening culture of impunity. Failure to institutionally and decisively act could undermine our democracy. Our politicians, political parties and security agencies have become important threats to our democracy and we must work to hold them to account. The Nigerian political class should be recognized as such and place in the right plinth for interrogations, increased engagement and be exposed for local and international sanction.
Despite the serious failings of the Kogi gubernatorial and senatorial elections, YIAGA AFRICA wants to thank those voters who went to the polls despite the myriad of challenges. We would also like to thank the many Nigerians across the state who volunteered to serve as non-partisan election observers on behalf of all the people of Kogi. Despite the shortcomings of the elections, YIAGA AFRICA commends the dedication and commitment of the National Youth Service Corps (NYCS) members who served as ad hoc poll officials. YIAGA AFRICA also appreciates the collaboration of our development partners and their commitment to Nigerian initiatives to ensure credible elections in our country.

YIAGA AFRICA, through the #WatchingTheVote initiative, is committed to promoting more credible elections by providing independent information on the conduct of elections and independently verifying the accuracy of election results. #WatchingTheVote is For All Nigerians, Beholden to No One, and Driven By Data.

Long live Kogi state, long live Nigeria. Thank you.

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Dr. Hussaini Abdu
Chair, YIAGA AFRICA Watching The Vote – Kogi Observation Mission

Samson Itodo
Executive Director, YIAGA AFRICA

For media inquiries please contact:

Moshood Isah
Communication Officer
YIAGA AFRICA
Tel. +234 (0) 703 666 9339
Email: misah@yiaga.org

Learn more about #WatchingTheVote at www.watchingthevote.org or on social media on Facebook at facebook.com/yiaga.org or on Twitter @YIAGA.