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I. INTRODUCTION

1. In conformity with the relevant provisions of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the Electoral Act 2022 and the Independent National Electoral Commission Regulations and Guidelines for the Conduct of Elections, the Nigerian electorate was called to the polls on 25th February 2023 to elect the next President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and members of the Senate and the National Assembly.
2. Pursuant to the provisions of the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001), **His Excellency Dr Omar Alieu TOURAY**, President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), deployed an Election Observation Mission (EOM) to the Presidential and National Assembly elections in the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as part of ECOWAS support to the consolidation of the democratic processes in the country.
3. The EOM was led by myself, **Ernest Bai KOROMA, former President of the Republic of Sierra Leone**, and deputized by **His Excellency Baba Kamara, former National Security Adviser of the Republic of Ghana**. The EOM also comprised officials from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of ECOWAS Member States, experts from the Electoral Commissions of ECOWAS Member States; delegations of the ECOWAS Parliament, the Community Court of Justice, and the ECOWAS Council of the Wise; Ambassadors of ECOWAS Member States accredited to ECOWAS, Media Experts and Members of Civil Society.
4. The Mission was supported by a Technical Team from the ECOWAS Commission led by **Ambassador Abdel-Fatau MUSAH**, Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security.



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II. COMMITMENTS AND SUPPORT TO THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

5. In keeping with the provisions of Articles 42(2) and 44(b) of the 1999 ECOWAS Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security, Article 12 of the 2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, and Article 53(c) of the 2008 ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework, the ECOWAS Commission deployed a ***Pre-election Fact-finding Mission to the six (6) geopolitical zones of the Federal Republic of Nigeria from 23rd October to 12th November 2022.***
6. ECOWAS followed up on most of the recommendations made by the Pre-Electoral Fact-Finding Mission to ensure their implementation by the concerned Nigerian institutions and stakeholders. In this regard, ECOWAS organised dialogue and mediation training sessions, and consultative engagements on non-violent elections for political actors and relevant stakeholders from November 2022 to January 2023 across the six geopolitical zones, as tools for preventing and mitigating election-related conflicts and disputes.
7. To effectively monitor and observe the Presidential and National Assembly elections, the ECOWAS Commission deployed a Core Team of 13 Thirteen (13) Experts, Twelve (12) Long-Term and Two Hundred and Fifty (250) Short-Term Observers to cover the pre-election, Election Day and post-election phases in the six geopolitical zones.

III. ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNS, SECURITY AND THE MEDIA

8. The Mission took note of the signing of two Peace Accords by all the political parties and their candidates, the first on 29th September 2022 and



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the second on 22nd February 2023, to enlist their commitment to the peaceful conduct of the 2023 general elections.

9. The electoral campaigns took place in all the geopolitical zones in a peaceful and conducive atmosphere. The political parties and their candidates actively carried out their campaigns and had the opportunity to disseminate their manifestos and programmes to the electorate. The main method of the campaign was through street rallies and town hall meetings based on an agreed schedule among the political parties and candidates. The Mission notes that security was provided for all the presidential candidates during the campaigns and throughout the electoral process.
10. The Mission notes the high level of citizens' mobilization, advocacy and sensitization carried out by Civil Society Organisations to promote a conducive environment for credible, inclusive and violence-free elections.

The Mission also notes the vibrant media landscape animated by more than 300 newspapers, 108 magazines, 300 radio and 125 television stations spread across the country. The major radio and television stations with greater national reach are based in Abuja and Lagos.

IV. PRE-ELECTION CONSULTATIONS, DEPLOYMENT AND OBSERVATIONS

a) Consultations



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11. Upon his arrival in the Federal Republic of Nigeria on 21st February 2023, the Head of the ECOWAS Election Observation Mission, **H.E. Ernest Bai KOROMA**, former President of the Republic of Sierra Leone held consultations with **H.E. Geoffrey ONYEAMA**, Minister of Foreign Affairs, **General Lucky Irabor**, Chief of the Defence Staff, **General Abdulsalami Abubakar (rtd.)**, Chairman, National Peace Committee and **Professor Mahmood Yakubu**, Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as well as major civil society coalitions.
12. The Head of Mission also met with some candidates and representatives of the political parties competing in the elections. In addition, he held consultations before and after the elections with the Heads of Election Observation Missions of the African Union (AU) led by **H.E. Uhuru KENYATTA**, former President of the Republic of Kenya, the West African Elders Forum led by **H.E. John D. MAHAMA**, former President of the Republic of Ghana, the Commonwealth led by **H.E. Thabo MBEKI**, former President of the Republic of South Africa, **H.E. Joyce BANDA**, former President of Malawi representing NDI/IRI, as well as the Heads of the Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) of the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) and the European Union. He also met with **Ms Geovanie BIHA**, Acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Officer-in-Charge of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), and a cross-section of the ECOWAS Ambassadors accredited to Nigeria.
13. Following these consultations, the Head of Mission encouraged the Independent National Electoral Commission to ensure the conduct of a free, fair and credible election and urged the political parties and candidates to enhance their voter sensitization and mobilisation campaign and encouraged the Nigerian citizens to come out on Election Day to fulfil their civic duty.



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14. In line with his preventive diplomacy mandate, the President of the ECOWAS Commission, His Excellency Omar Alieu Touray, addressed a solidarity message to the Nigerian population and concerned stakeholders in the electoral process on the eve of the elections, encouraging them to ensure the conduct of credible and peaceful polls.

b) Deployment

15. Following a pre-deployment briefing session organised by the ECOWAS Technical Team, the 250 Short-Term Observers were deployed to the six geopolitical zones of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, namely: **North-West, North-East, North-Central, South-West, South-East, and South-South and the Federal Capital Territory-Abuja.**

c) Opening, Conduct of the Election and Vote Counting

16. After careful analysis of the information received from the observers deployed in the field, the Mission notes the following:
- The late start of voting beyond the 08:30 AM opening time due to the late arrival of polling officials and voting materials and, in some cases, the delivery of wrong materials, at polling stations across the country. There were postponements of elections in some polling units in Lagos, Imo, Bayelsa, Rivers and Edo States, due to electoral violence or logistics challenges;
 - The unavailability of sufficient quantities of electoral materials in many polling stations across the country;
 - The visible presence of security agents discharging their duties in accordance with the provisions of the law; in some polling units, however, they were inadequate;



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- Most polling officials and ad-hoc staff demonstrated inadequate knowledge of their duties, especially with the voting materials;
- The agents of the major political parties - the All-Progressives Party (APC), People's Democratic Party (PDP), the Labour Party (LP) and the New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP) - were present in most of the polling stations visited;
- There was the use of indelible ink to indicate that a voter had cast their ballot; some polling units ran out of ink, delaying the resumption of voting;
- All voters were requested to present their Permanent Voter's Cards (PVC) and were accredited by the Bimodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS) machines before they were allowed to vote at all the polling stations observed;
- Priority was given to vulnerable persons, including the elderly, women, and nursing mothers, and necessary assistance was accorded to persons with disability to enable them cast their ballots;
- The set-up of most of the polling units visited did not adequately protect the secrecy of the voting process;
- Presence of international Observers from the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU), the Commonwealth, the British High Commission, NDI/IRI and other local observer missions in some polling stations;
- Voter turnout was generally low in most of the polling stations visited;
- Polls closed in most of the polling stations visited as stipulated by INEC (at 02:30 PM); prospective voters in the queue at 02:30 PM were allowed to exercise their franchise;
- Vote counting and tallying processes were carried out in a transparent, simple and professional manner, in the presence of party agents, observers, and security agents in the daytime in some polling units and with lamps in others, where voting was delayed;



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- However, the collation sequence differed from polling station to polling station: the total votes cast were recorded first in some polling units while in others, the total votes were calculated as a total of the votes cast for each party/candidate and invalid votes at the end of the tabulation. This, however, did not lead to any major challenges.
- There was a cooperative and non-adversarial relationship between the electoral officials and party agents, which facilitated easy and efficient conduct of the election;
- There were cases of BVAS failure to accredit voters due mainly to technical issues relating to login details, configuration or internet connectivity.

V. Incidents

17. The processes on E-Day unfolded in a generally peaceful environment. However, incidents of violence, killings and disruption were recorded in several States. The Mission deplores the unfortunate incidents that occurred in the lead-up to E-Day, leading to loss of life in some parts of the country. These include the murder of the Labour Party senatorial candidate for Enugu East senatorial district, alongside five of his supporters; and three persons who lost their lives in Kano in clashes between supporters of two rival political parties, APC and NNPP.
18. On E-Day, an attack perpetrated by Boko Haram insurgents in Gwoza Local Government Area of Borno State resulted in five persons injured. Similarly, there were reported attacks by bandits in Alawa, Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger State.



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19. Violent incidents were likewise recorded in the Mafoluku area of Oshodi in Lagos State, where masked men, armed with Pump Action rifles disrupted voting and burnt ballot papers and boxes.
20. There were also reported cases of ballot snatching and BVAS theft in some States, including Delta, Katsina and Anambra. Specifically, an incident was recorded in Oshimili Local Government Area of Delta State, where thugs attacked a polling unit and, in the process, fled with two BVAS machines. Similarly, In Safana LGA, Katsina State, thugs attacked a voting centre and snatched six BVAS machines.
21. However, while few BVAS were recovered by the security forces, INEC's contingency arrangements enabled the continuation of voting as stolen BVAS machines were replaced and security was reinforced in the areas affected.
22. The Mission presents its sincere condolences to the families of the victims.
23. The Mission notes the increasing misinformation and disinformation on social media, including misleading conjectures and projections regarding the outcome of the 25th February 2023 general elections, liable to cause disaffection and inflame tensions in the polity. It urges the public to disregard the provocations and continue to rely on official pronouncements on the electoral process by INEC and other competent national institutions.
24. The observations detailed here-in cover events in the lead-up to E-Day and the voting process on E-Day. The ECOWAS Election Observation Mission will continue to observe the concluding phases of the electoral



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process; engage stakeholders where necessary, in line with its preventive diplomacy mandate, and make additional observations if needed.

25. It shall, in due course, compile a comprehensive report of its findings, including best practices and shortcomings observed as well as incidents with precise Polling Unit locations and numbers to concerned stakeholders in the Nigerian electoral system for consolidation and remedial purposes. To that end, ECOWAS shall also engage the concerned stakeholders.

VI. Conclusion

26. The ECOWAS Election Observation Mission commends His Excellency Muhammadu Buhari, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and the legislative bodies of Nigeria for the measures taken, including the adoption of the new Electoral Act, that strengthened the autonomy and freedom of action of INEC and ensured greater transparency and inclusivity of the electoral process.
27. The Mission, however, implores the authorities to apply adequate mitigating measures in the implementation of major policy decisions during electoral periods, such as the monetary measures being currently implemented, in order to ease the burden of citizen participation in the electoral process.
28. The Mission commends INEC for the measures taken to improve the level of confidence of the electorate in the elections and its proactive communication and interventions to resolve challenges in real time on E-Day. The Mission, however, noted that the logistics delays in the commencement of the voting process in some of the polling stations as well



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as some technical challenges experienced with the BVAS machines affected the efficiency of the process in some areas.

29. The Mission commends the speed and transparency in the collation of electoral results and urges INEC to ensure prompt transmission and declaration of the provisional results.
30. The Mission applauds the resilience, patient determination and commitment of the electorate to democratic consolidation throughout the electoral process. In particular, the Mission salutes the enthusiasm and commitment of the youth to contribute effectively to democratic consolidation through their active engagement in the process.
31. In the same vein, the Mission applauds the professionalism of the security forces and all stakeholders involved in the management of the electoral process and salutes the great political maturity that the Nigerian citizens displayed throughout this process.
32. The Mission, in the meantime, wishes to make the following recommendations:

To INEC

- *Intensify and increase the frequency of communication on developments regarding the electoral process to the general public and promptly share information in order to discourage misinformation through social media and other means;*
- *Ensure ongoing training of technical and ad-hoc staff to professionally handle/resolve issues related to the use of the BVAS Machines;*
- *Review the system of uploading results in real time;*
- *Enhance communication on the voting, collation and process;*



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To the Political Parties

- Enhance women's participation in the electoral process, including by encouraging champions in the advocacy by "He Party Members" for the enhanced and meaningful roles of "She Party Members";
- Ensure continuous training on civic education for their members for peaceful elections;
- Encourage their members and followers to desist from the use of inflammatory utterances and acts liable to incite violence in the post-electoral phase.
- Urge the candidates in the presidential election to respect the outcome of the election as will be announced by INEC, and to resort, if the need arises, to exclusively legal channels to resolve any electoral dispute.

33. The ECOWAS Observer Mission, through the Core Team, the Long-Term Observers and the Technical Team of the ECOWAS Commission will continue to monitor post-electoral developments and recommend mitigating measures where needed.

34. The Mission wishes to underscore the importance of the Nigerian elections for the entire ECOWAS region, the Federal Republic of Nigeria being the powerhouse of the ECOWAS region. Accordingly, and in line with ECOWAS' preventive diplomacy mandate, the Mission will intensify its post-electoral engagement with the candidates, the parties, INEC, and the critical political stakeholders, to facilitate the legal and peaceful resolution of any emerging disputes from the polls.

35. The Mission expresses appreciation to the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for the measures taken to facilitate the deployment of ECOWAS observers for the election of 25th February 2023.



ECOWAS COMMISSION
COMMISSION DE LA CEDEAO
COMISSÃO DA CEDEAO

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Done at Abuja, this 27th February 2023.

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Former President of the Republic of Sierra Leone
Head of ECOWAS Electoral Observation Mission to
the Federal Republic of Nigeria