

JOINT STATEMENT ON NIGERIA'S RECENT ELECTIONS

May 17, 2007

Nigeria's recent elections were a terrible setback for democracy, marked by widespread rigging, ballot stuffing, fraud, violent thuggery, administrative chaos and critical delays. Brazen and systematic collusion among the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), the Independent National Election Commission (INEC), and local security cemented PDP single party dominance. These outcomes have left Nigerians cynical and pessimistic about Nigeria's democratic prospects, and provoked outrage, widespread calls for reform and disturbing evidence of popular disengagement.

President-elect Yar'Adua will assume power on May 29 with weak legitimacy and credibility, and questionable stability and governing capacity. He will confront deep doubts that under his leadership Nigeria will be able to carry forward a democratic agenda, internal conflict resolution in the Niger Delta and elsewhere, economic reform and anti-corruption efforts, and continental leadership to promote democratic norms and efforts to end chronic internal wars in places such as Darfur. Debate will persist over whether this failed election will invite further domestic violence and instability, with broader consequences across Africa. From a U.S. perspective, there is grave concern that Nigeria's failed elections will compromise the U.S.-Nigeria bilateral relationship and place at-risk rising U.S. interests in Nigeria and in Africa at-large.

The U.S. government should approach the Yar'Adua administration with considerable caution and put it on notice that:

1. The elections were a terrible outcome that has damaged democracy's prospects in Nigeria and set back Nigeria's reputation in the United States.
2. The new leadership must take urgent steps to establish credibility and regain international support and cooperation. Prospects for full and constructive bilateral cooperation will depend on concrete and rapid progress in several critical areas:
 - Full restoration of civil liberties and political rights.
 - Incorporation of opposition figures into national policy debate.
 - Open dialogues with civil society and political groups on the institutional failings of the Fourth Republic
 - Replacement of INEC's discredited leadership and overhaul of the electoral system, including new legislation, registration, and electoral procedures, and the creation of independent oversight and monitoring entities for future elections.
 - Immediate corrective action of flagrant election outcomes in such states as Ondo, Edo and Ekiti.
 - Urgent action to empower and accelerate the work of electoral tribunals.
 - Reinvigoration of anti-corruption campaigns and appointment of a new and credible economic reform team.

- Launch of a major initiative on the Niger Delta, including a new political dispensation and mechanisms for promoting accountable, community-based development.
- Designation of a senior official empowered to work with the United States and others on Darfur and other pressing security challenges in Africa.

During the upcoming transition, Washington should expand its engagement with Nigeria's civic actors and the institutions of the judiciary and the National Assembly, the latter with special emphasis on fulfilling constitutional responsibilities for national finances. If the Yar'Adua government systematically improves its legitimacy and credibility within Nigeria, Washington should consider a new program of international support for Nigeria, including assistance to the Delta, introduction of Millennium Challenge Corporation transition assistance, and support of expanded Nigerian power generation and other infrastructure. Washington should make clear that the U.S. looks to Nigeria to effect major reforms so as to reinvigorate its democracy and leadership.

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