



PREVENTING ELECTION-RELATED VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

WHAT IS STILL POSSIBLE?

FEBRUARY 4, 2015

Nigeria's national elections take place exactly ten days from today, with state-level elections two weeks thereafter. Below are six policy actions that we believe can be taken today, and every day, from now through the election and post-election period to mitigate violence within and between communities. As NGOs who have made a long-term commitment to supporting Nigerian-led efforts to build peace and prevent violence, we encourage the global community at this critical juncture to:

1. **Encourage and amplify Nigerian and international messages of and commitments to non-violence.** Nigerian political leaders at every level should be encouraged to commit publicly to a non-violent process, to existing legal means to resolve disputes, and to accountability for those doing violence. International leaders should encourage additional statements through diplomatic channels, and reinforce these messages through their own statements.

Statements are being featured on national, state and local media, and can still make a difference. In past elections, joint public and private statements at the ministerial level between the "Friends of Nigeria" group have been influential. Coordination at the Abuja level is a first step, but should be escalated to joint ministerial public and private statements.

2. **Support local, national and international civil society and media efforts to monitor, document, and report inflammatory rhetoric through social media and traditional media.** Many civilians and civil society organizations want to report and fight back against inflammatory rhetoric but are uncertain about the terms or processes for effective reporting. The recent Kenya elections have shown the value of holding outlets and individual social media users accountable for hate speech. Local coalitions such as the Partners for Peace Network, a local network of over 1600 peace actors meeting monthly and conducting sensitization across the 9 Niger Delta states, can help facilitate access to information and processes.
3. **Establish clear, agreed upon, and accessible post-election grievance mediation structures before the elections to deter violence during the elections.** Ensuring fora are in place through which communities can discuss and seek justice for any corruption, violence or abuse that may occur during the elections period may help deter violence. Nigerian civil society and many of our local partners feel strongly that establishing a mechanism now can help prevent violence. These mechanisms should be established at local, state, and national levels, should be facilitated by multiple types of leader such as traditional, government, youth, religious, and other leaders, and should be clearly communicated to the public.

- 4. Support media coordination efforts around violence prevention.** The role of the media in preventing electoral violence is crucial. Media can spur on violence, or encourage peace. Media can propagate rumors or debunk them. News reporting will play a particularly critical role in defusing violence risks and establishing the legitimacy of the process especially if they work across regions in the post-elections period. Targeted outreach to individual media can encourage them to play a more active and constructive role, and surge funding can help support targeted campaigns to:
 - a. Disseminate information around how to access voter ID cards through radio, television, social media and print;
 - b. Monitor processes and explain legal challenges to the results that will likely arise in a contested election;
 - c. Encourage joint coverage by media across regional and political lines. This includes the “synergy” of 36 leading radio stations doing joint real-time coverage round the country. Other ideas could include common messages on the front page of newspapers.

- 5. Engage the Nigeria private sector to make a private-sector case for peaceful elections.** The role of individual private sector leaders can be critical, as well as collective action by the chambers of commerce at the state and federal level. Business leaders can influence political actors to abide by peace pacts and to accept election results, and they should be included in conversations at state and federal levels to ensure that constituents are not mobilized for violence. Outreach to national and state-level Chambers of Commerce could be critically helpful.

- 6. Establish clear contingency plans to enact in bad, or worst, case scenarios at every level.** At the local level, this should include identifying capacities for local action to defuse worsening situations through media, influential local leaders and civil society groups. The Abuja-based Peace and Security Working Group can support this, as well as local platforms like the Civil Society Situation Room and the Transition Monitoring Group. In advance of the elections, international diplomatic actors should identify and ensure their ability to reach out to key Nigerian influencers, potential trusted national and international mediators and advisors, and set up a mechanism for consultation among major international partners – including the AU and ECOWAS – in the post-elections period.

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