

UNIRIGHTS at the 2007 Nigeria elections

Nigeria's Elections Below Acceptable Standards

Credit: IRI, International Republican Institut MICHAEL DAVIS (UNIRIGHTS, left), JOHN CAVENAUGH of IRI and RAILA AMOLLO ODINGA who is the new Prime Minister of KENYA

Preliminary Findings of IRI's International Election Observation Mission

April 22, 2007

Abuja, Nigeria - The International Republican Institute's (IRI) 59-member international election observation delegation determined that the first three parts of Nigeria's April 14 and April 21 elections process, which is thus far incomplete, fall below the standard set by previous Nigerian elections and international standards witnessed by IRI around the globe.

The fourth and final component of this process, the resolution of electoral disputes, will be critical. As such, the delegation is encouraged by the capability and degree of independence demonstrated during this election cycle by Nigeria's Supreme Court and legislature. IRI's delegation urges any aggrieved parties to use the courts and the constitutional process — and not the streets — to resolve those disputes.

In a December 2006 statement, an IRI pre-election assessment delegation said, "Democracy is not a destination — it is a journey." Nigeria has now completed three of the four components of its journey in this electoral process — preparation for administering the elections, the environment of the campaign period and Election Day itself.

IRI's pre-election assessment delegation raised concerns nearly five months ago about the weaknesses in the voter registration system. Potential voters had been informed through media of the need to register to vote, but they received almost no information about how, when or where to register. These problems were repeated during this month's general elections in the lack of civic education for balloting day. Nigerians were encouraged to vote, but again, were inadequately informed about where and how to vote.

The second component of the process, the pre-election environment, was greatly marred by attempts to bypass Nigeria's constitutional process to selectively disqualify candidates running for office.

In the third component, the days of balloting on April 14 and April 21, IRI's delegation witnessed numerous problems. On April 21, IRI saw polls opening late in the majority of the states observed, some as late as 5:15 p.m., due to the lack of preparedness to effectively distribute the necessary election materials to polling stations throughout Nigeria; confusion over the announcement in the change to polling hours on the eve of elections further complicated the process. A number, if not most, of assembly and senate races were postponed due to errors in printed ballots or a lack of ballots altogether. Presidential ballots did not have serial numbers or candidates' names.

Irregularities were significantly higher than during the state and local elections the previous week. Recurring incidents included underage voting, voter registration list errors, stuffed ballot boxes, group voting, party observers and police instructing individuals on who to vote for, lack of privacy for voting, lack of results sheets and other materials, falsified results sheets, and early closings.

Neither the spirit of Nigerians who went to the polls to cast their ballots nor the dedication of the thousands of poll workers struggling to execute their responsibilities in polling stations throughout the country were matched by their leaders.

These elections did not measure up to those observed by the members of IRI's international delegation in other countries, whether in Africa, Asia, Europe or the Western Hemisphere.

Nigeria is now entering the critical fourth component of the process: how to resolve any disputes from Election Day. A peaceful constitutional process must be allowed to unfold and there must be creditable avenues of redress. Over the last year, Nigeria's Supreme Court and legislature have demonstrated an ability to resolve important political disputes with independence and integrity.

These institutions of democracy are underpinned by the many Nigerians who want to make democracy succeed in their country. Voters and poll workers demonstrated clear dedication to advancing democracy in their country, giving great hope to IRI's delegation. There is no doubt that Nigeria has the ingredients of a vibrant democracy and the potential to be a shining example to the African continent and the rest of the world. The delegation supports and

encourages the Nigerian people and their institutions in their efforts to strengthen democracy and enhance freedom.

Even moreso than in other countries, IRI's delegation will follow the adjudication process closely, particularly through the coming month. IRI will issue a comprehensive report which will include conclusions and recommendations.

IRI delegates, from China, Democratic Republic of Congo, Hungary, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Namibia, Poland, Somaliland, Uganda and the United States, monitored more than 100 polling stations in Abuja, Bauchi, Benue, Cross River, Ebonyi, Enugu, Gombe, Imo, Kaduna, Katsina, Lagos, Nassarawa, Ogun, Oyo and Plateau.

IRI's delegation was led by Abbe Apollinaire Muholongu Malumalu, President of the Independent Electoral Commission of Democratic Republic of Congo; Ambassador Pierre-Richard Prosper, former U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes; and The Honorable Andras Gyurk, of Hungary, Member of the European Parliament.

Other delegates were Israel Akinsanya, National Chairman of Liberia's Liberty Party; Michael Davis, Executive Director of the Universal Human Rights Network; The Honorable Pawel Gras, Member of the Polish Parliament; The Honorable Carole Hillard, former Lieutenant Governor of South Dakota; Minister Edna Adan Ismail, former Foreign Minister of Somaliland; Jia Ping, of China, human rights lawyer and civil society activist; Christopher Khisa, aide to Member of the Kenyan Parliament, The Honorable Noah Wekesa; Rachael Leman, Policy Coordinator for U.S. Congressman David Dreier; Li Fan, of China, President of the World and China Institute; Dr. Robert Lloyd, Professor of International Relations at Pepperdine University; The Honorable Raila Odinga, Member of the Kenyan Parliament; Scott Palmer, former Chief of Staff to U.S. Congressman Dennis Hastert; Dr. Peter Pham, Director of the Nelson Institute for International and Public Affairs at James Madison University; The Honorable Manuel Pinto, former Member of the Ugandan Parliament; Dr. Jessica Piombo, Professor and Regional Coordinator for Sub-Saharan Africa at the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School; Ambassador John Price, former U.S. Ambassador to Mauritius; Tommy Ross, Legislative Assistant to U.S. Congressman David Price; Ambassador Lange Schermerhorn, former U.S. Ambassador to Djibouti; Sylvestre Somo, aide to the President of the Democratic Republic of Congo's Independent Electoral Commission; Marc Traoré, of Mali, Vice-Secretary of Programming for the Community of Democracies; Ambassador Charles Twining, former U.S. Ambassador to Cameroon; The Honorable Benjamin Ulenga, Member of the Namibian Parliament; Beau Walker, Legislative Assistant to U.S. Congressman John Boozman; The Honorable Noah Wekesa, Member of the Kenyan Parliament; Chris Wyrod, Africa Program Officer at the National Endowment for Democracy.

IRI staff also served as observers and assisted in the mission. IRI staff were led by Lorne Craner, President; Elizabeth Dugan, Vice President for Programs; Stephanie Blanton, Regional Director for Africa programs; and Matthias Naab, Country Director for Nigeria.

For nine years, IRI has played a role promoting Nigeria's democratic transition and has worked to strengthen the political process in Nigeria. Since the 2003 elections, IRI has focused on strengthening Nigerian political parties in the pivotal years between elections. IRI monitored Nigeria's 2003 and 1999 presidential and national assembly elections, 1999 state elections and the 1998 local elections.

IRI has monitored more than 130 elections in more than 40 countries.

Press briefing in Washington regarding the Nigerian 2007 elections. Including: Michael Davis (UNIRIGHTS), Lange Schermerhorn (Ambassador), Loren Craner (President of the International Republican Institute).

Credit: IRI, International Republican Institut
<http://www.iri.org/africa/nigeria/2007-04-22-Nigeria.asp>