

The African Commission calls for targeted measures for ensuring free, fair, and credible elections in the Federal Republic of Nigeria

Feb 22, 2023

The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (the African Commission), through its Country Rapporteur for the Federal Republic of Nigeria – Honourable Commissioner Solomon Ayele Dersso, is following the preparations for the conduct of national elections in Nigeria with a lot of interest.

The Commission applauds both the regularity of the convening of national elections and the efforts made to safeguard the integrity of the elections by the Independent National Electoral Commission of Nigeria, which serves as one of the vehicles for realizing the rights of the peoples of the country to participate in the management of their affairs, and to self-governance, respectively under Articles 13 and 20 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (African Charter).

The African Commission however expresses serious concerns about threats of violence linked to the forthcoming elections, resulting not only from existing conditions of insecurity in the country but also importantly from dissemination of misinformation and disinformation, as well as incitement of hate and violence accompanying the electoral campaigns.

The African Commission also expresses its alarm about a range of conditions that threaten the exercise by voters of their sovereign right to cast their ballots to candidates of their choice, freely and without any threats of violence or use of financial inducements.

The African Commission is further concerned by some of the rhetoric and campaign messaging from rival political parties as well as from emerging logistical challenges relating to access to fuel in some places, which may affect the functioning of the institutions responsible for the conduct of the elections and the active participation in the electoral process of various elections stakeholders, as conditions necessary for free, fair and credible elections.

The African Commission also notes that the electoral campaigns are very heated, and that candidates have been engaged in not only trading of accusations but also messaging that may cast doubt on the credibility of the electoral processes and the attendant risks of electoral disputes and violence.

The African Commission is also conscious of the potential negative impacts of the confusion surrounding the decision of the Central Bank of Nigeria to replace the circulation of old Naira notes with newly designed ones, and the tension that this has triggered.

The African Commission further recognizes that the existing conditions of insecurity and incidents of violence associated with the electoral process as well as other unfavourable conditions highlighted above, disproportionately affect vulnerable sections of society including women, older persons, persons with disabilities and financially poor people, and thus threaten to undermine their rights to vote.

In the light of the foregoing, the African Commission:

1. Commends the efforts made and arrangements put in place for holding the elections regularly and timeously, and to safeguard the integrity of the electoral processes;
2. Urges the Government of Nigeria to deepen its efforts to establish more secure conditions, particularly in areas most affected by insecurity and violence;
3. Calls on the institutions responsible for the conduct of the general elections including the Independent National Electoral Commission of Nigeria, to ensure that political parties and candidates comply with applicable rules and provide full, unhindered and proactive access to information for fostering public trust in the electoral process and enhancing voters' ability to make informed choices;
4. Urges the Government to create conditions that would enable various professional and national rule of law institutions such as the Bar Association and the National Human Rights Commission, to monitor and report on the electoral process, among others, as a means of deterring various actors from engaging in acts that undermine the free and fair conduct of the elections;
5. Requests that clear guidelines are provided to personnel of security institutions of Nigeria to operate strictly within the bounds of the international human rights principles governing the use of force, including, non-use of deadly force against unarmed civilians;
6. Calls on the Government of Nigeria to promptly hold consultations with various affected sectors of society with a view to resolving the confusion and heightened sense of uncertainty arising from the timelines for changing the old Naira and the unavailability in good quantities of the newly designed Naira in all places, as well as the implications that these have on the electoral process; and
7. Urges the Government to press the political parties and candidates as well as their constituencies, to totally refrain from misinformation and disinformation, and any acts of incitement of hate and violence.

Hon. Commissioner Solomon Ayele Dersso
Country Rapporteur for the Federal Republic of Nigeria