

Nigeria Working Group  
337 N. Carolina Ave SE  
Washington, DC 20003

November 9, 2018

Michael R. Pompeo  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo,

As a coalition of 18 civil society organizations, faith communities, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in Nigeria to advance human rights, peace, and security as well as to administer humanitarian aid and foster economic development, we are increasingly concerned about the potential for electoral violence during the upcoming February 16, 2019 elections for the Nigerian presidency and National Assembly. We urge the State Department to take high-level preventive diplomatic action and resource proactive programming to ensure a peaceful, credible election in Nigeria.

The risk of electoral violence in Nigeria is serious. In a [Special Report](#) released in September, the United States Institute of Peace outlined several indicators of the potential for electoral violence, including social and economic inequalities, ethnic and religious divisions, and structural weaknesses, such as corruption.<sup>1</sup> Growing insecurity also exacerbates the potential for violence around voting and election results. Almost 2 million Nigerians are internally displaced and over 200,000 are living as refugees in neighboring countries.<sup>2</sup> Many of these displaced persons are not registered to vote and are unable to access polling places in their home communities. In the northeast, Boko Haram terrorism has killed over 1,500 people since the beginning of 2018 and the death toll from farmer-herder conflict in central states now stands at approximately 1,800 deaths since January of this year.<sup>3</sup> The growing violence and insecurity has shaped campaign rhetoric and has become a major election issue as politicians respond to citizen demands for

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<sup>1</sup> Verjee, Aly, Chris Kwaja, and Oge Onubogu. "Nigeria's 2019 Elections: Change, Continuity, and the Risks to Peace." September 2018.

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR. "Nigeria Situation." Operational Portal.  
[https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/nigeriasituation#\\_ga=2.152681278.683933686.1540474874-860225059.1540474874](https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/nigeriasituation#_ga=2.152681278.683933686.1540474874-860225059.1540474874) (accessed October 29, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Matfess, Hilary. "Fulani Militias in Nigeria: Declining Violence not a Sign of Lasting Peace." ACLED. October 5, 2018. <https://www.acleddata.com/2018/10/05/fulani-militias-in-nigeria-declining-violence-not-a-sign-of-lasting-peace/>.

security. Ethno-religious tensions stoked and created by violence throughout the country risk heightening the potential for election-related violence. At the same time, politicians have exacerbated existing divisions and fear for political gain in the polls.

In 2015, Nigeria experienced its first relatively peaceful transfer of presidential power, thanks in part to robust U.S. engagement in election preparation and violence prevention programs. We encourage the U.S. government to replicate its 2015 electoral violence prevention strategy that helped mitigate large scale violence around election results, registered many IDPs displaced by Boko Haram, and bolstered Nigeria's first peaceful transition of power. Our organizations operating in Nigeria have observed major risk factors for election violence in the forthcoming elections and are concerned that without similarly robust U.S. diplomatic engagement, this cycle could be marred by the electoral violence that left more than 800 dead after the 2011 vote. The United States should take the following actions:

- **First, engage in cabinet-level diplomatic meetings with Nigerian political leaders.** We encourage you, as Secretary of State, to visit Nigeria as early as possible to communicate the United States' expectation of a peaceful and credible election process and its willingness to hold accountable individuals who incite violence or vote tampering. We urge you to meet with all major party candidates and seek their public commitment to refrain from violence and support a credible, transparent election. As conducted in 2015, we also encourage the Vice President to call or meet with the leading candidates and the Assistant Secretary for African Affairs to lead the U.S. election observation mission in February as an indication of high-level U.S. attention and support to democracy, good governance, and peace in Nigeria.
- **Second, fully resource local civil society and media organizations working on transparency and accountability through voter education, election monitoring, and peacebuilding activities.** During his visit to Nigeria, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Tibor Nagy, should reaffirm U.S. commitment to the people of Nigeria by meeting with local civil society actors engaged in election monitoring, civic engagement, and violence prevention. These initiatives could include amplifying messages of non-violence and civic participation by high-profile Nigerians or efforts to report incidents of electoral violence in a conflict-sensitive manner. We are unaware of any U.S. government foreign assistance programs currently being implemented that are specifically focused on electoral violence prevention. The U.S. should resource and support efforts to prevent violence as well as increase voter registration for all Nigerians, with specific efforts to register internally displaced persons in the country. The U.S. government should provide support to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) at the same levels as in 2015 as well as support to international election observer

missions that can release preliminary findings of the vote's credibility to the public and international community as quickly as possible. All U.S. election support should work closely with local actors as part of a long-term strategy to proactively encourage civic participation, foster strong local governance, and prevent violence across Nigeria.

- **Third, the diplomatic community should engage in comprehensive electoral violence scenario planning and development of action and response plans.** Following the example completed for the 2015 elections through the Peace and Security Network (PSN), the diplomatic community should work together with NGOs to prepare an extensive list of potential scenarios for election violence and apportion responsibilities for response should that situation arise. The State Department should release a public fact sheet outlining its comprehensive strategy to prevent electoral violence during the 2019 Nigerian elections, as it did in the 2015 factsheet [“Nigeria: U.S. Government Assistance in Support of Free, Fair, and Peaceful Elections.”](#)<sup>4</sup> These scenarios and action plans should be completed in advance of the elections and communicated widely with stakeholders in Nigeria and the United States.
- **Lastly, reinvigorate engagement and planning at the principal or ministerial level between the embassies based in Nigeria to jointly prepare messaging and responses to election scenarios.** The U.S. government should enlist the support of other governments to release proactive statements that jointly convey their expectations about peaceful, credible elections and their intended actions should violence arise.

Peaceful, credible elections in Nigeria are essential for advancing the United States' economic and security interests in the region; but the window of opportunity to conduct effective preventive diplomacy is closing. We urge you to direct the State Department to develop, release, and implement a comprehensive strategy to prevent electoral violence and support elections that serve the people of Nigeria. We will stand with you in pursuing this important goal.

Sincerely,

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Act4Accountability

Africa Faith and Justice Network

Africans Rising for Justice, Peace, & Dignity

Church of the Brethren Office of Peacebuilding and Policy

Conference of Major Superiors of Men

Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, US Provinces

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<sup>4</sup> U.S. Embassy and Consulate in Nigeria. “Nigeria: U.S. Government Assistance in Support of Free, Fair and Peaceful Elections.” March 26, 2015.

Ecumenical Poverty Initiative  
Franciscan Action Network  
Friday Odeh, Accountability Lab Nigeria  
Hip Hop Caucus  
Mercy Corps  
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd  
Peace Direct  
PeacePanel Community Center, Nigeria  
Search for Common Ground  
The United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society  
Togolese Civil League