

# Press release: STATEMENT ON THE OCCASION OF THE BEGINNING OF 2019 ELECTION CAMPAIGNS

As friends of Nigeria and its people, we will follow the campaigns and election process closely. Who wins the elections is for the Nigerian people to decide. Our concern is to see a process leading to free, fair, transparent and peaceful elections.

We hope to see transparent campaigns and we urge all voters to use their democratic right and vote. We are particularly keen to see greater participation of women, youth and people living with disabilities.

We urge all involved – political and non-political actors – to refrain from using hate speech and take a firm stance against violence. The 2015 Peace Accords played an important role in that regard and we welcome new efforts towards that end.

We were gravely concerned over widespread incidents of intimidation, interference and vote-buying during the recent gubernatorial elections. We were also perturbed by irregularities and violence during party primaries, and noted with particular concern that several women candidates were disenfranchised.

We reiterate the importance of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as it fulfils its constitutional role. INEC must be allowed to operate free from outside pressure and intimidation, and in turn must demonstrate full neutrality and professionalism. We encourage that adequate funding is swiftly facilitated for INEC and supporting institutions, and we hope to see the entry into force of improvements to the Electoral Act as soon as possible.

We wish to draw particular attention to the fundamental role of the security agencies in providing a safe and secure environment for the Nigerian people to exercise their democratic rights. It is vital that security agencies act, and are seen to act, in an impartial manner that maintains the high standards of professional conduct.

We strongly support the principle of media freedom and the vital role the independent media plays in ensuring informed public debate. We also stress the importance of balanced, neutral and non-defamatory coverage.

At the beginning of the 2019 electoral campaign, we would like to reiterate our strong commitment to support democracy in Nigeria. We encourage Nigeria and its people to consolidate and deepen democracy, building on the standards set in 2015.

Signatories: European Union (Delegation to Nigeria), France, Germany, United

Kingdom, United States, Australia, Austria, Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden.