



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**NDI/IRI Joint International Observer Delegation Release Preliminary Statement on
Nigeria's February 23 Elections**

Abuja, Nigeria - Today, the joint international observation mission of the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) releases its preliminary statement on the Nigerian presidential and National Assembly elections, which took place on Saturday, February 23. The preliminary statement builds on the findings of the joint NDI/IRI pre-election assessments conducted in July, September and December 2018.

The mission was co-led by: former Vice President of The Gambia, H.E. Fatoumata Tambajang; NDI President, Ambassador Derek Mitchell; and IRI President, Dr. Daniel Twining. The leadership originally also included former President of Botswana, H.E. Festus Mogae; former President of Latvia, H.E. Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga; former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Ambassador Johnnie Carson; and IRI Vice Chairman Randy Scheunemann, all of whom arrived on February 12 in anticipation of the February 16 election.

The 40 member international delegation, which was deployed to all six geopolitical zones of the country, included political and civic leaders, election experts and regional specialists from 19 countries across Africa, Europe and North America.

"These elections are extremely important for Nigeria and the subregion. Our presence as observers is a mark of our solidarity with the people of Nigeria as they work to deepen their democracy," stated H.E. Fatoumata Tambajang, former Vice President of The Gambia.

"The resilience and strong dedication to democracy of the Nigerian people was inspiring to observe. Despite the country's many challenges, the international community should continue to invest in Nigeria's democratic promise," said Ambassador Derek Mitchell, President of NDI.

In its preliminary statement, the joint mission seeks to reflect the international community's interest in and support for democratic electoral processes in Nigeria; provide an accurate and impartial report on the election process to date; and offer actionable recommendations to the improve future elections.

"IRI and NDI have worked to support Nigerian democracy and observed every general election since 1999. We congratulate the Nigerian people for their commitment to democracy -- despite the election postponement and election day delays that risked disenfranchising voters," said Dr. Daniel Twining, President of IRI.

The mission notes that Nigeria has achieved significant democratic gains over the past two decades since the return to civilian rule, including in managing elections. High levels of citizen engagement in supporting inclusive and credible polls through voter education and

election monitoring demonstrate the strong commitment of Nigerians to their democracy. However, the last minute postponement of the election by INEC and significant delays in the opening of polling units undermined citizen confidence in the electoral process and disenfranchised voters. Last minute election postponements should not become the norm in Nigeria. Also, the mission urges political parties to ensure more inclusion of women, youth, and other marginalized groups and promote peaceful conduct by their supporters.

The statement provides actionable short term (before the gubernatorial elections), midterm and long term recommendations for Nigerian stakeholders to improve the overall electoral process in Nigeria.

The IRI/NDI mission stresses that this statement is preliminary in nature. With elections postponed in parts of three states, the tabulation and announcement of final results have not been completed. As this process continues, the mission calls on Nigerian political parties and candidates to cooperate in good faith with INEC; political leaders to adhere fully to the 2019 Abuja Accord and respect the will of the Nigerian people as expressed through the ballot box; and for INEC to release official results in a timely manner. The mission recognizes that, ultimately, it is the people of Nigeria who will determine the credibility of these elections. NDI and IRI will continue to watch the remaining phases of the electoral process, including the announcement of official results and swearing in of newly elected officials.

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About NDI

The National Democratic Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization working to support and strengthen democratic institutions worldwide through citizen participation, openness and accountability in government. [Visit ndi.org](http://ndi.org) to learn more.

About IRI

The International Republican Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to advancing freedom and democracy worldwide. IRI enables political parties to become more issue-based and responsive, helps promote citizen-centered governance, and works to increase the role of marginalized groups in the political process. [Visit iri.org](http://iri.org) to learn more.