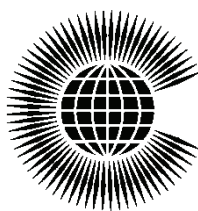


ANNEX III: Arrival Statement



Commonwealth Observer Group Nigeria National Assembly and Presidential Elections 2011

NEWS RELEASE

Arrival Statement by HE Festus Mogae Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group

Following an invitation from the Independent National Election Commission (INEC), the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Kamallesh Sharma, has constituted an Observer Group for the 2011 Nigeria National Assembly and Presidential Elections in Nigeria. It is my honour and privilege to lead this Commonwealth Observer Group and be here in Nigeria for these important elections. The Commonwealth has supported Nigeria through many of its previous elections and we are pleased to do so again as the country continues to consolidate its multi-party democracy.

The team of Observers comes from across the Commonwealth, and includes current or former politicians, electoral experts and representatives of civil society, academia, youth and the media. We are supported by a team from the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Democracy and good governance are core Commonwealth principles, which our Observer Group is constituted to promote and uphold. These elections are crucially important for the people of Nigeria, as they elect their representatives; it is imperative that the electoral process is transparent, fair, violence-free and credible.

Our task is to observe and report on relevant aspects of the organisation and conduct of the elections and also on the environment in which the elections are held. The Group will consider all the factors impinging on the credibility of the electoral process as a whole, and assess whether the elections have been conducted according to the standards for democratic elections to which Nigeria has committed itself, with reference to its own election-related legislation as well as relevant regional, Commonwealth and other international commitments.

We will consider, among other things, whether or not: conditions exist for free and competitive elections; the electoral commission is independent and effective; the voter register provides for universal suffrage; state institutions and public media are impartial; there is a level playing field in the campaign and that the campaign is free of violence; voters are free to express their will; and, the results process is transparent.

In conducting our duties and undertaking our assessment, we will be impartial, objective and independent. Commonwealth Observers are present here in their individual capacities as eminent and experienced Commonwealth citizens and the intent of the Group is to help further strengthen the democratic process in the country.

In the pre-election period we will meet a wide range of stakeholders, including INEC, representatives of political parties, civil society, the police and media, as well as High Commissions. Indeed our meetings have already commenced. We will also meet with representatives of other international and national observer groups, with which we will co-ordinate closely.

Prior to election day, Commonwealth teams will deploy to a variety of locations around the country to observe the voting, counting and results processes. Our teams will re-deploy after the National Assembly Elections to observe the Presidential Election. We hope to issue an Interim Statement after the Presidential election and a Final Report at a later stage.

In the wake of the flawed 2007 elections it is vital that Nigeria writes a new electoral chapter, restoring public confidence in the country's democratic institutions and processes. All stakeholders must play their due role in that quest.

We hope that INEC can set the example by displaying integrity, impartiality and technical competence. We look to the political parties to respect the rules of the game, to focus on the issues and to reject violence. The media and civil society need to be diligent custodians of democracy. And finally, we look to the people of Nigeria to show the way by participating in large numbers in the democratic process and choosing freely and fairly those who will govern them.

Abuja, Monday 28 March 2011

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