

# **Transparency in the Polls: A Review of the role of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) in the April 2011 General Elections in Nigeria**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The 2011 Nigerian general elections is definitely a landmark election in a country whose previous elections had been marred by fraudulent and corrupt practices. The 1999 general election which brought a former military leader, General Olusegun Obasanjo into Aso Rock(The Presidential Villa) after several tussles within the nation's political agenda to usher democracy after long military rule that was fraught with several irregularities and fraudulent practices. In 2003 and 2007, there were indications also that the election (2003) that gave a second term mandate to President Obasanjo and the one that elected his successor 9Alhaji Musa Yar'adua in 2007 into office were no different from that of 1999. Although President Obasanjo left office in 2007 having served two four year terms, it was obvious that he masterminded the selection of Alhaji Musa Yar'adua who in turn chose Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, the then governor of Bayelsa State as a running mate.

The choice of Jonathan may have been misconstrued by pundits and many people in Nigeria as a plan put together by President Obasanjo. However, the general election that ushered the era of Yar'adua and Jonathan was flawed by corruption, election malpractices and illegal maneuvering by party henchmen. Having been elected, President Yar'adua accepted that corrupt practices may have marred the election that put his administration into power and promised Nigerians election reforms. He used the media and billboard advertisements to initiate a formidable campaign for election reforms as well as the rule of law.

As the steps towards the election reforms were put in place, President Yar'adua fell ill and later died. It was an uphill battle in Nigeria after the death of Yar'adua to allow his Vice, Dr. Jonathan to take over as the President as stipulated in the constitution of the country. The national assembly resolved the turmoil and Vice President Goodluck Jonathan was sworn in as the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The constitution stipulated that the Vice President should be sworn in as the President pending the election in 2011. As President Goodluck Jonathan took the mantle of leadership as the President of Nigeria, he promised the country a free and fair election which was already slated to take place in April 2011. To keep his promise, he released the INEC Chairman, Prof. Maurice Iwu and replaced him with Prof. Attahiru Jega, a respected and erudite political science scholar and the Vice Chancellor of Bayero University, Kano. The appointment of Prof. Jega was another change geared towards transformation and a welcome idea from Nigerians and the international community as widely published in various daily newspapers as well as television and radio broadcast.

Prof. Iwu's leadership attempted from various fronts to record a resounding election success for Nigerians, however, the presidency and other Nigerians saw the need to establish a leadership change. Iwu may have given the INEC plum job his best shot during his tenure as INEC Chairman as evidenced in the various elections conducted under his watch, records showed that despite the strenuous efforts exerted by Iwu's leadership in INEC, voters as well as candidates and the respective political parties clamored for change. The quest for change regardless of Prof. Iwu's innovative ideas on how elections should work in Nigeria resulted in the appointment of Prof. Jega who went to work immediately and laid a progressive plan to advance a transparent poll in Nigeria. His swearing in was welcome as another change in the position of INEC leadership in Nigeria as he assembled resourceful team of his fellow university professors, members of the Nigerian academe to assist him in the task of making INEC work and also changing most of what his predecessor has had in place prior to his appointment. He laid a clear foundation for a new INEC whose mission was to take Nigerian voters to plain democratic terrain where their votes should count in electing their candidates of choice.

To show how prudent and transparent the President is and to keep his promises, he assured the new INEC chairman of his support to provide all the necessary tools that would assist the commission to execute its duties. He also pledged having no control of the commission as he would allow them to perform their duties as an independent entity. Dr. Goodluck Jonathan instructed the commission and the entire Nigeria not to rig the election for him and asserted that as a candidate, if he runs and loses, he will leave office and recognize the winner.

### **Nigerian Election and Global Minimum Standard of Transparency**

The April 2011 general elections in Nigeria generated a much more political and social debates as to how Africa's most populated country was to conduct a free and fair election; in view of its previous election malpractices. The World was watching to see how prepared and transparent the Federal Government was in handling this election.

Addressing a delegation of observers from the National Democratic Institute (NDI), President Goodluck Jonathan said:

“Nigeria, Africa's most populated nation, cannot aspire to a leadership position on the continent if it fails to organize a free and credible poll. Several countries in Africa have had successful elections, and if we don't get it right, we can't lead anybody or call anybody to order when they miss the mark” (Banner advert – e-tourism Africa, 2011).

The President in his response to the delegation also reassured of his promise to deliver a free and election in Nigeria. He stated his responsibility to lead by example by making sure that Nigeria conducts an election that would meet global minimum standards of transparency and fairness regardless of his incumbent candidacy.

In a nationwide broadcast, he appealed to voters to turn out en masse to cast their ballots and elect candidates of their choice.

### **Guaranteed Free, Fair and Credible Elections- INEC Promised**

The April 2011 general elections in Nigeria was conducted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) under a new leadership. Everything humanly possible was done to ensure that it meets the expectation of Nigerians as well as international observers. Various agencies, think-tanks, political parties, Nigerian scholars in Diaspora and at the grass root levels, media scholars and media professionals as well as individuals from diverse experiences were engaged in numerous discussions and a variety of issues regarding a free and fair conduct of the election. In making sure that INEC performed a credible job, and work towards keeping their promises and the

promise of the President by making sure that the country had a transparent election, organizations such as Enough is Enough Nigeria (EiE) and other notable agencies continued to monitor INEC in the following areas:

### **1. Voters' Register**

Nigerians and various independent non-governmental organizations (NGO) reported to INEC irregularities they found regarding names of registered voters omitted from the accreditation list and urged them to earnestly ensure that such a problem was rectified across all polling units to avoid disenfranchising legitimate voters. INEC was also told to provide the number of people registered for each polling unit to enable independent observers to quickly verify that legitimate voters were not unduly disenfranchised (Enough is Enough Nigeria: <http://www.odili.net/april 6>, 2011/).

### **2. Logistics**

Logistics issues were also raised by various independent groups and most Nigerians. Issues such as inadequate ballot papers; errors in distribution of ballot papers; errors in the printing of some ballot papers as some party logos were either omitted or repeated and sent to INEC to enable them execute their plans. The commission worked around these issues to bring resolve in time for a hitch-free elections (Enough is Enough Nigeria: <http://www.odili.net/april 6>, 2011/).

### **3. Vendor**

INEC was also instructed as a government body to scrutinize the process of awarding contracts to make sure it was transparent. The commission's challenges that resulted in the postponement of the April 2 election based on the disappointment and

blamed for the printing vendors who delayed the completion of their duties was raised as the Jega led commission promised to deliver (Enough is Enough Nigeria:

<http://www.odili.net/april 6, 2011/>).

#### **4. National Youth Service Corp (NYSC)**

The Independent National Electoral Commission made concerted effort to take care of the welfare of the members of the National Youth Service Corps recruited for the general elections. The issue of NYSC remuneration and the process of payment were seriously considered by the commission as a must accomplished venture so as to hold them accountable. Brigadier General Tsiga, the NYSC Director General played a key role in making sure that the Corp members who were serving their country under his charge were adequately catered to (Enough is Enough Nigeria: <http://www.odili.net/april 6, 2011/>).

#### **5. Communication**

INEC established a consistent communication portal by using the voters' telephone numbers collected as part of the registration exercise to communicate with Nigerians in a timely and effective manner. They also established a direct communication by SMS with polling unit officials across the country to increase efficiency. These areas were adequately strengthened to avoid any form of opportunity to blame the commission or the system for any fraudulent intention (Enough is Enough Nigeria:

<http://www.odili.net/april 6, 2011/>).

#### **Guidelines and the role of INEC during the April 2011 General Elections**

The leadership of INEC under Prof. Attahiru Muhammadu Jega who promised Nigerians a credible and corruption free election started with considerable guidelines that

must be followed by his subordinates' majority of whom were his colleagues in academia. He appointed presiding officers who were in charge of the polling units and was responsible for signing all electoral materials collected on **Form EC 25B** which is the electoral materials receipt form. The presiding officers ensured that the electoral materials issued to their polling unit were the right type and quantity, and they had to go through the materials one by one to have clarity and more understanding of the materials. The presiding officers made sure that the voters register given to them were thoroughly inspected page by page to ensure that all the pages were signed and stamped with the INEC stamp and that no page was missing (<http://www.inecnigeria.org/guidelines-for-the-general-elections-april-2011/>).

The Presiding officers shall be assisted by two poll assistants in the discharge of their responsibilities which included the accreditation of voters which shall start in every boot from 8 a.m. until 12:00 noon. The presiding officers ensured that as voters arrived at the polling unit for accreditation, that they shall check their voter's card against their names in the voter's register. These officers ensured that voters waiting in the queue at 12:00 noon shall be accredited; however, any voter coming after 12:00 noon shall not be accredited. The officers made sure that temporary voter's card only shall be accepted for accreditation and voting.

The guidelines for the April 2011 general elections in Nigeria, also stipulated that voting shall start at 12:00 noon and ended when the last person on the queue voted. It was also clearly stated that once a voter was accredited, the index finger of his/her left hand will be marked with an indelible ink. A presiding officer shall next enter in **FORM EC 8A**, a statement of results from figures and words (a) the number of voters on the register

and (b) the number of accredited voters. A presiding officer shall after the accreditation period introduce the poll assistants, security agents and accredited party agents. He shall explain the voting procedure to the voters as well as all activities that constituted electoral offences and the penalties for committing such offences as listed in the electoral act of 2010. It is the responsibility of the presiding officer to invite all accredited voters to queue up in front of him/her in one single line. In a voting environment where culture or religious belief does not allow men and women to mingle in a queue, the officer shall allow separate queues for men and women (<http://www.inecnigeria.org/guidelines-for-the-general-elections-april-2011/>).

Another guideline which must be adhered to was to count the number of all accredited voters on the queue and announce the number loudly to the hearing of all present. The number of all the accredited voters that has been announced should be entered into **FORM EC 8A** in figures and words which should be signed by the presiding officer in the appropriate section and the polling agents invited to sign. The transparent ballot box should be displayed to everybody present before the commencement of voting. The voters shall be invited to move one at a time to the presiding officer's table, and issue him/her with a stamped, signed and dated ballot paper. After receiving the ballot paper, the voter should be asked to move to the voting cubicle to thumb-print in the space opposite the symbol of the party of his/her choice and drop the ballot paper in the ballot box in the full view of all present.

### **Counting of votes**

In order to maintain transparency as it pertains to the present vote count of the contemporary times, the presiding officer shall make sure (a) that the content of the ballot

box shall be emptied on the table; **(b)** that all ballot papers are sort according to party symbols; **(c)** that the presiding officer shall count loudly the number of votes scored by each candidate using the alphabetical order of names of the political parties; **(d)** that the number of votes scored by each candidate shall be entered in **FORM EC 8A** in the space provided in both figures and words; **(e)** that the poll result shall be verified by cross checking the number of persons registered to vote at the center, the number of accredited voters in the queue before voting commences; and record the total number of votes scored by the candidates; **(f)** that the polling officer shall nullify the result where the total number of votes cast for the candidates exceeds the total number of people accredited to vote at the polling unit, after thorough verification; **(g)** that where the result is nullified, endorse **FORM EC 8A** for the polling unit as follows: “result cancelled”. **(h)** that the nullification of the result shall be announced to the those present immediately; **(i)** that the polling officer signs **FORM EC 8A** and invite one party agent from each of the political parties to sign the Statement of Result Form; **(j)** that the polling officer shall give a copy of the duly completed and signed **FORM EC 8A** to the following **(1)** each party agent and **(2)** the security agents; **(k)** that a copy of the result shall be posted at the Polling Unit; **(l)** that the polling officer shall proceed immediately with the original copy of the result and deliver same to the Collation Officer at the registration area center accompanied by security agents and party agents; and **(m)** that the polling officer shall return all the election materials used during the election to the election officer (EO) through the Supervisory Presiding Officer (**SPO**) for preservation

[\(http://www.inecnigeria.org/guidelines-for-the-general-elections-april-2011/\)](http://www.inecnigeria.org/guidelines-for-the-general-elections-april-2011/).

### **Collation Officer**

In order to maintain the promises of credible free and fair election made by the President of the federal Republic of Nigeria and in keeping with the appointment of Professor Attahiru Jega as the Chairman of INEC, a group of trusted Nigerians were appointed by the Chairman as Collation Officers whose responsibilities include the collation of results either at **(a) Registration Area Center (RAC), (b) local government area level and (c) at the state level.**

### **Registration Area Center**

At the registration area center, the registration area collation officer is in charge of the collation center. He/she shall work in liaison with the security agents to see to the maintenance of law and order at the collation center. He shall use **FORM EC 8B** to collate votes entered in **FORM EC 8A** submitted to him by the presiding officers, polling unit by polling unit to get the registration area level results by the candidates. In a situation where there has been a cancellation in a polling unit by a presiding officer or where elections did not hold in a polling unit, the fact of that cancellation or non-holding of the election shall be entered in **FORM EC 40G** by the collation officer. The registration area collation officer shall call out loudly the total votes scored by candidates in the registration area center and signs **FORM EC 8B** and invite each candidate or party agent of the political parties to sign the form. The refusal of the party agents to sign the results will not however invalidate the result of the poll. The registration area collation officer shall after signing **FORM EC 8B** give a copy to the following: **(a) each party agent, (b) the security agents, (c) the original copy goes to the local government collation officer, (d) the electoral officer and he (e) must post a copy of the result at the collation center (<http://www.inecnigeria.org/guidelines-for-the-general-elections-april-2011/>).**

**Collation Officer at the Local Government Area Level:** The local government collation officer is in charge of the local government collation center where he/she liaises with the security agents in maintaining law and order at the collation center. The local government area collation officer shall use **FORM EC 8C** to collate results from **FORM EC 8B** submitted to him by the registration area center officers. He/she shall enter in **FORM EC 8C** votes scored by the candidates as recorded on **FORM EC 8B** to get the results for the candidates for that federal constituency. The local government area collation officer shall make sure that where there has been an entry in **FORM EC 40G**, that details of such entries shall be collated in **FORM EC 40GI** and the entry shall be loudly announce the total votes scored by all candidates in the local government area. The local government collation officer shall sign **FORM EC 8C** and invite the party agents to sign the form. Their refusal to sign the form will however not invalidate the result of the poll. The local government collation officer shall distribute copies of the signed **FORM EC 8C** to the following: (a) the original copy for the returning officer at the State level, (b) copies for the candidates, (c) one copy for the resident electoral commissioner through the electoral officer, (d) one copy for the electoral officer, (e) a copy each for the security agents. He/she shall announce and declare the result of the election and post a copy of the result at the collation center

[\(http://www.inecnigeria.org/guidelines-for-the-general-elections-april-2011/\)](http://www.inecnigeria.org/guidelines-for-the-general-elections-april-2011/).

**Collation Officer at the State Level:** At the State level, the State Returning Officer is in charge of the State Collation Center. He/she liaises with the security agents to ensure that law and order is maintained at the collation center. He/she shall use **FORM EC 8D** to collate results from **FORM EC 8C** submitted to him/her by the local government

returning officers, local government area by local government area, to get state results for the candidates. Where there has been an entry in **FORM EC 40 GI**, details of such entries shall be collated in **FORM EC 40G2** and the results scored by all candidates in the state shall be loudly announced taking into consideration **FORM EC 40G2**. The state collation officer shall sign **FORM EC 8D** and invite the party agents to sign the form. However, their refusal to sign the form will not invalidate the result of the poll. The state officer shall distribute copies of the signed **FORM EC 8D** to the following: **(a)** the original copy to the chief electoral officer for the federation, **(b)** copies for the candidates, **(c)** one copy for the resident electoral commissioner, and **(d)** a copy each for the security agents. The state collation officer shall post a copy of the result at the collation center.

**INEC Chairman's Charge:** Before the commencement of their duties as electoral officers responsible for the conduct of the April general elections in Nigeria, these citizens were given a charge by the Chairman of INEC:

**“You are called upon to perform a very important national assignment, which calls for seriousness of purpose, honesty and integrity. You must take both the training and the actual exercise seriously. Master thoroughly the various forms and materials you will handle in the conduct of the elections. Practice as often as possible how to fill the forms as practice makes perfect. The Independent National Electoral Commission and indeed the entire nation look up to you to act your part well and ensure free, fair and credible elections”.**

Prof. Attahiru Muhammadu Jega, OFR  
Chairman, INEC

March 2011

[\(http://www.inecnigeria.org/guidelines-for-the-general-elections-april-2011/\)](http://www.inecnigeria.org/guidelines-for-the-general-elections-april-2011/).

## **The role of Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) during the April General Elections**

In no area of public life have practicing politicians taken media effects more seriously than in the area of elections (Graber, 1990). Political campaign organizations as well as political party leaders concentrate more of their time, effort and most importantly money to attract favorable television attention to their candidates who are running for a major elected office. Party engagements, coupled with various campaign activities are packaged for the media delivery to the electorates who are targeted for votes and numbers on the Election Day. It is no illusion to say that media systems mostly the television creates an amazing image for political candidates and turn them to super powers even prior to the Election Day.

In Nigeria, during the April general elections, the Nigerian Television Authority, NTA adhered strictly to the professional ethical code of practice before, during and after the elections by monitoring both the government and politicians during the campaign and subsequently as the election exercise was in progress. They did this by adequately informing Nigerians at home and in Diaspora about the campaign, the election and political manifestoes. They also guided the voters on the election process and interpret electoral laws and voting guidelines for better understanding of the voting public.

NTA also played the role of agenda-setters to Nigerian voters by their ability to tell them not only what to think but obviously what to think to about. In its consistent reportage of various campaign messages and slogans from the various political parties, NTA was able to use its large audience at a time to influence the perception of the Nigerian voters on who they may consider the favorite candidate for a specific elected

office. As a result of this influencing ability of NTA, Lippmann (1922), White (1972) and Perloff (1998) opined that the media has the power to set the agenda of public discussion which determines what the voters will talk and think about, most of the NTA messages force attention to certain issues that guides the voters in making their decision.

In various parts of Africa in contemporary times, political parties have used the television, and even the electronic mailing systems to advance their political agendas. Politicians can effectively reach their audience in a timely basis through the television. Political campaigns are organized easily with the use of various media paraphernalia (Nwokefor, 2010). In Nigeria for instance, during the 1999, 2003, 2007 and most importantly the April 2011 April general elections, these politicians use television, radio, and newspapers as a source of information dissemination to pass their campaign message to the voters. Their campaign messages are tailored to specific audiences preferably the voters and they are able to reach them in a timely manner regardless of distance. Media programs are more entertaining and adequately available. Various politicians target their voters through the means of television programs and use the internet based on affordability to tell their political stories. The improved NTA programs, such as the popular Nigerian movies, have been used to target voters. A good example is Nollywood movies in Nigeria, which has significantly improved the use of the television products to reach a diverse audience (Nwokefor, 2010).

Reviewing the agenda-setting role of the media mostly during elections, Nwanko (2000) examined the process of “issue emergence” and relates it to the formation of official or government agenda. He argued that by selectively, objectively, and repeatedly presenting information raised by a silent majority, the media, in the case of this chapter

the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) sets not only the tone but the enabling environment for what eventually becomes the official agenda for Nigerian voters (Nwanko, 2000).

Describing the contributions of the media to democratic politics, Okoro, (2010) quoting Epstein (1974, p. 129) identifies surveillance, interpretation, and political socialization as functions that are collectively provided by the mass media in the form of news reports and analyses which they provide to the larger societal context and in the interest of this chapter, the Nigerian electorates.

In strengthening its strong political base in the south western Nigeria, for instance, Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) used the media in convincing its members as well as wooing membership from other political parties. NTA used its ability to reach large audience to influence the party's targeted members to vote ACN, a strategy that worked in the parties favor as it won very convincingly in the entire south west except in the presidential election.

Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) was able to structure Nigerian voters' perceptions of political reality because through their reporting capability as well as being able to reach a critical mass in a short period of time, they were able to influence issues that made up the agenda of a particular party. NTA plays the role of an information disseminator power house that controls the political message by influencing the political playfield. The People's Democratic Party (PDP) used the power of incumbency to present their presidential candidate, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan and used NTA owned and operated by the government as a very strong information disseminator tool that sets their agenda to the Nigerian voters. This strategy was successful in putting Jonathan and

Sambo on the highest presidential campaign pedestal against their opponents and the result was a landslide victory. The Jonathan/Sambo Presidential campaign coupled with the Gubernatorial aspirants of various states such as Enugu, Rivers State, Imo State, Lagos State, Cross Rivers State to mention a few as well as aspiring members of the National Assembly worked strenuously with their campaign staff and party stalwarts to gain attention and publicity through NTA so that they will sustain the morale of their campaign volunteers and ultimately win elections.

In addressing the role that media play in presenting every phase of the campaign as a horse-race scenario, Patterson (1980) opined that news people (television) always designate winners and losers in primary political contests, in daily routines, in debates, and in public opinion polls. He asserts that the media provides winners with tremendous momentum and drags losers to defeat. In view of Nigeria Television Authority's role during the April 2011 general elections in bringing news and information to the Nigerian voters, some of the third party candidates received minimal coverage as opposed to PDP, ACN, CPC APGA or ANPP. The third (small) parties are nearly invisible, however, especially on network NTA, these minor parties had no significant access to the news and in most news coverage received insignificant percentage of news time when compared to the big and well renowned parties as mentioned above. Former Director General of the Nigerian Television Authority, Dr. Tonnie Iredia who referred the mass media, mostly the television as the engine oil that lubricates the heart of a sustainable democracy, said that "the main function of the mass media is to keep people informed". He advised Nigeria media practitioners during the election season to enlighten the public on civic, political and voter education. According to Dr. Iredia, "public enlightenment is a non-

stop exercise that should involve everybody including institutions, non-governmental organizations, and political parties” (Okachie, 2011).

NTA was also responsible in reporting life the voting exercise ranging from the arrival of the INEC team in various voting areas to their settling down and putting their election paraphernalia together. The instructional moments when the voters were given directions as to the voting processes and the does and don'ts, the accreditation principles and duration including the period of actual voting were seamlessly covered by NTA. For Nigerians in Diaspora mostly those in the United States who are subscribed to NTA International, the news about the elections and the voting processes were regular news program coverage. NTA International played a very crucial role in bringing the election and voting moments to the comfort of those homes that subscribed to NTA. In various moments of the election, during the voting, counting and announcement of the results, the Nigerian Television Authority carried the news live and even engages some authorities in a roundtable talk. This media opportunity assists tremendously in reviewing various perspectives of the election and voting behavior of Nigerian voters. In most of their programs, such as NTA's It's Time, a regular Monday through Friday morning program has engaged various professionals in discussing relevant issues about the election and its results. In so doing, NTA has been instrumental in relating the election outcome to the National audience who are very eager to know the reaction of people to the election outcome.

### **Transparency in the April General Elections**

Prior to the appointment of Prof Attahiru Jega as the Independent National Election Commission (INEC), President Jonathan promised Nigerians a credible, fair and

free election and also improved the confidence of the electorate in Nigeria. Prof Jega's trust was earned by Nigerian coming from a trustworthy school of thought and the January and February 2011 voters' registration further increased the trust both in him as a credible professional and in the election process. The guidelines for the general election coupled with the team of presiding and collating officers as well as local and state representatives who were credentialed professionals was an indication that the INEC chairman believed in the transparency of the polls promised by the President.

The general election days showed a generally peaceful and orderly process with enthusiastic voters committed to patiently attend accreditation and voting from the early hours to the end of each voting day. During the duration of the general election and voting process in Nigeria which started on April 9 after the postponement of the April 2, through the end of the election, violence was not as intense as during previous elections. The authorities were serious in their commitment to minimize the escalation of clashes between political rivals while adequate security was put in place to monitor and maintain a peaceful election atmosphere through the period of the election exercise. INEC also carried out a voter education campaign using the print and audio-visual media. Direct public outreach activities were decentralized to community level engaging traditional leaders, religious groups and non-governmental organizations (NGO's). The messages delivered to the Nigerian electorates presented the voting procedures, discouraging violence and urged the people to go out and vote their conscience. INEC broadcasts their expectations and the expectations of all Nigerians in regards to the elections in English and four local languages. Voter education programs were also conducted by the Ministry of Information and the National Orientation Agency as well as local NGO's. (European

Union Election Observation Mission Nigeria 2011: (<http://www.eueom.nigeria.eu>). These strategies were to make sure that transparency was maintained through the election and voting periods.

Addressing the issue of transparency in the April general elections in Nigeria, the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) team deployed in Nigeria from March 1 through May 21, 2011 following an invitation of INEC, gave a remarkable observation of the election which was said to have been very transparent and more organized than the previous elections. According to the chief observer of the 141 members of the 27 EU member states deployed to all the States and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Alojz Peterle, who stated that despite some short comings here and there identified during and after the voting which need to be enhanced, the 2011 elections marked an important improvement compared to all polls observed previously by the European Union in Nigeria (European Union Election Observation Mission: 2011 General Elections – foundation for further democratic development:

<http://www.reliefweb.int/node/405296>).

On a positive note, the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) noted that Nigeria has implemented several recommendations suggested by the 2007 EU EOM and the 2008 Electoral Reform Committee's (ERC) report. The Chief Observer of the EU EOM team, Peterle advised INEC and the Federal Government of Nigeria of one of its key findings which was a high number of underage registered voters particularly in the northern areas of Nigeria, some communities including non-eligible citizens on the roll, which contradicts the Electoral Act 2010 as amended as well as the intimidation of the members of the National Youth Service Corps to allow the inclusion of underage

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registrants during the registration exercise. These were some of the challenges found by the European Union Observing team.

Conclusively, the Chief Observer of the European Union Team opined that the role of Civil Society Organizations, which played an important role in promoting the rule of law, the adherence to election regulations and encouragement of an overall orderly and transparent electoral process was considered very positive ((European Union Election Observation Mission: 2011 General Elections – foundation for further democratic development: <http://www.reliefweb.int/node/405296>). Noting the substantial improvements in the April 2011 general elections, Peterle further said:

“according to the findings of our 141 observers, almost all polling units opened timely, the atmosphere was predominantly peaceful and calm. Logistics, organization of accreditation and counting was commendable in most locations. However, shortcomings during voting were observed....”

The Alliance for Credible Election (ACE) a non-governmental organization (NGO) conducted a credible survey with an exciting outcome. According to ACE Chairman, Mr. Innocent Chukwuma:

“ the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was well prepared both during the voter registration and from the beginning of the election to the end. The issue of election violence and other notable malpractices in subsequent elections in Nigeria were minimized. In their survey, about 92% of Nigerian voters indicated their willingness to vote in future elections” (NTA – International News: June 24, 2011).

Listening to the Nigerian Television Authority International (NTAi) It’s Time Program on Friday June 24, 2011 directed by the program presenter, Mr. Oku Ekpenyong, the Chairman of the All Nigerian Nationals in Diaspora (ANND) Chief Peter Mozie commended INEC and President Goodluck Jonathan for making available an enabling environment that necessitated credible, free and fair elections in Nigeria. Chief

Mozie indicated that his group of more than 400 Nigerian professionals from different areas of specialty visited President Jonathan in 2010 December to apprise him of their intent to assist Nigeria in whichever way possible to achieve his transformation agenda. The group was approved by Prof Jega's leadership to send election observers from the Diaspora. All Nigeria Nationals in Diaspora assisted in voter education campaign as well as joining the European Union Observers in observing the electoral processes throughout the April 2011 general elections (NTA-International Program – It's Time, Friday, June 24, 2011).

The Acting Director of the Citizenship and Leadership Training Center (CLTC) Abuja, Mr. Michael Fawole commended President Goodluck Jonathan and the Chairman of the National Electoral Commission (INEC) Prof Attahiru Jega for the successful conduct of the April 2011 general elections, describing the entire election process as credible and transparent. Mr. Fawole in his commendation said thus:

“Nigeria was on the path to true democracy which would engender economic and social transformation and urged the people to sustain their confidence in the electoral process. The orderly and peaceful manner in which the National Assembly and Presidential elections were conducted and the efforts of both the Federal Government and the Independent National Electoral Commission to see that the elections were free and fair is an indication that both the government and the people have resolved to take Nigeria to greater height through the path of transparency and honor and this is highly commendable” (Amodu, 2011, p.25).

In view of the overall assessment of the election outcome from the Nigerian electorate, the media and various organizations and agencies, have rated the April 2011 general elections as a work in progress while a significant majority saw it as a huge success for the country's democracy. The Nigerian Television Authority and other mass media houses including African International Television (AIT) scored the election very high.

The United States government was impressed by the efforts of Nigeria in conducting a credible, free, and fair election. In his comment during his meeting with President Jonathan, in the White House, the United States President, Barack Obama urged Dr. Goodluck Jonathan to take his election as a good opportunity to pursue the development of Nigeria and promised that the U.S. government would invigorate its assistance to the country through the U.S. Nigeria Bi-national commission (The Nigerian Starting Point: <http://www.odili.net/nigeria.html>).

### **Conclusion**

The Nigerian electorate spoke with their votes in the April 2011 general election as they voted in an atmosphere of peace and tranquility. They voted for prosperity and not violence in an election exercise that have been adjudged as free, fair, credible and transparent by many Nigerian professionals at home and in Diaspora. The election outcome also was observed by local and international observers who rated the exercise as transparent and credible. The fairness of the election has been attributed to many factors which include the change in Independent National Electoral Commission's leadership, the massive voter education and reorientation of the people's mind, the lack of violence and use of area boys whose responsibilities include the snatching and stashing of ballot boxes, the adequate security in place to checkmate violence, the excellent job done by the members of the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC). The transparency of the election was also attribute to the marvelous job done by the Nigerian mass media most importantly the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), African International Television (AIT) and the radio network that was able to disseminate all the pertinent information

regarding the elections to both city dwellers and the electorates in the various grass root levels.

In its attempt to transform the country and make the international community believe that Nigeria could conduct a free, fair, credible and transparent election, President Goodluck Jonathan gave the Independent National Electoral Commission the autonomy it deserved without micro-managing their functions. The position of the President who was also a candidate for the office of the President was credible and must be highly commended. The brilliant role played by the INEC Chairman in bringing men and women of candor, credible character, and members of the Nigerian academe who put the nation first in the dispensation of their various elections responsibility was instrumental in a resounding transparent election outcome. Prof Jega an eminent scholar of repute with utmost integrity placed his level of previous authority as a Vice Chancellor of Bayero University kano on the line and ignored all the intimidations and long talks by sectional political busy bodies and did what is right. His leadership was the beginning of the credibility that was ascribed to the election process. He debunked the believe by political busy-bodies in “politics of selection” and “money bags” and did what was right without disenfranchising the people of their voting rights. The votes counted and the right candidates were elected into offices and the Nigerian INEC for the April 2011 general elections success and as was reported by international observers claims that transparent, free and fair elections can work in Nigeria.

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