

419 ELECTIONS**By****Gen. Muhammadu Buhari**

Gentlemen of the Press:

Exactly a week ago, on Wednesday, April 16, 2003, I addressed you under the auspices of the Presidential Candidates of the Conference of Nigerian Registered Political Parties (CNPP). This body does not include the ruling Peoples Democratic Party. At that world press conference, we drew attention to the fraud that was described as an election in many parts of the country on April 12, 2003. We said, and I would like to still say, that all the political parties, 30 of them, all our people, and our friends of the world community, held their breath in expectation of proof, through the outcome of the elections, that we could break the jinx which since Independence in 1960 has blocked the safe transition from one elected government to the other.

We had no doubt in our minds that fraud was the most appropriate word that could be used to describe what came out of the elections which on April 12 the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) conducted to the National Assembly. We expressed our views, which are universally accepted, that minimum standards are necessary for elections to be accepted to be free, fair, transparent, violent-free and credible. We listed what we considered as those minimum standards for credible elections.

Gentlemen of the Press. The information we have from all over the country shows that what happened in many parts of the country was not an election which democracy as practiced in other parts of the world would endorse. Let us subject the so-called elections in the South-South, South-East and some parts in the North to tests that are usually associated with credible elections so that the world can decide for itself whether we held elections on April 19; or whether we were treated to a shameless and massive exercise in allocation of votes with the only guideline being that the allocated votes should not exceed the number of registered voters in the register. In at least one instance, the votes exceeded the number in the register.

A credible election would ensure that those who were registered to vote knew where to vote, had access thereto, were allowed to vote, voted; that their votes were counted at the venue of voting, results released and endorsed by agents of the parties and the officials; that the results at the polling centers are the same results taken to the collation centers, processed and finally announced to the public, with all parties also signing these results and copies of the outcome given to them. Reports from all over the country show that these basic requirements were massively breached or even ignored.

- a) In many parts of the South-East and the South-South, there were no elections, and even where there were, ballot boxes already stuffed with ballot papers were brought to replace those which the people had cast to reflect their choice of candidates. Which means that those who believe that power should be retained at all

cost had decided to replace the people's right to choose with their own scheme to subvert the people. Such short-cuts to achieving power have never lasted in Nigeria.

b) In parts of the North, as in many parts of the South, the very agencies of state that were meant to be impartial umpires formed part of the scheme to subvert the people. They watched as results were being compiled with a view only to ensure that incumbency achieved its decision to retain office.

In many places, in shameful neglect of INEC guidelines, party agents were driven away from where figures were being compiled.

This election is the most fraudulent Nigeria has had since Independence. This would be the first election in which ballot boxes were forcibly removed with some security agents openly collaborating. This would be the first election in which ballot boxes are switched and the votes of Nigerians who must choose set on fire. This would be the first election in which, through elaborate collusion, those who lost elections were declared winners and those who won lost. This would be the first election in our history of conducting elections in which there is an elaborate scheme to allocate votes, using INEC's announced voters' register as a guide. This would be the first election in which the ruling party would have unlimited access to voters cards and ballot boxes which they stuffed days before the elections were actually held. Did we not inform you at the press conference we had last week that we had information that the elections being planned for April 19 were already being conducted and results already being compiled?

I would like to call on those who doubt these claims to please look at the published figures of the voting population and compare them with the results that emerged from the states controlled by the PDP in the South-South, the South-East and the North. Why would the number of votes cast reflect such a high percentage of registered voters, a pattern not shown in states controlled by the other parties. A close study of figures released shows that only in large urban cities where many of the monitoring teams were concentrated did the results show some natural order. Even here, the returns from the rural areas reveal the trend of a decision at a high level to massively abuse the ballot. This is not healthy for the country, never has been and never will be.

I have not come here to speak because I had not been declared winner of the elections. When I opted to seek mandate through the democratic process, I joined a political party and pushed for nomination. I understood and still understand that if you join a race, you either would win or lose. But you also knew that winning or losing had to be an outcome of a setting that everyone was aware of. There are rules and regulations that must be obeyed by those who are stakeholders. If the rules and regulations set by INEC in accordance with the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria had been clearly implemented, I would be the first, as a responsible citizen, to call up one who would emerge from such an exercise and say, "Congratulations." But there is nothing to congratulate anyone about in the elections that INEC conducted on April 19. They were a colossal exercise in vote allocation in the South-South, South-East and parts of the North, and I have no hesitation in rejecting the outcome outright. In the light of the clear case of rape on our democracy. I would plead with the international community not to recognize a government that is being formed on the basis this contraption because such a government lacks credibility and legitimacy.

Gentlemen of the Press. I came here this early from my polling constituency to leave no one in doubt about my views on the allocation of votes in many parts of the country which INEC has accepted as the outcome of the exercise it was mandated to carry out under our Constitution and our laws. Where votes are allocated and proven to be so through reports, there could not have been a decision that there was an election, and therefore there would be no case to go to the tribunal. But it would seem that results having been declared in places where there were no elections, INEC is pushing its responsibility to the Tribunals. I am all for due process, but I believe that in undermining the very processes that would lead to the sustenance of the democratic values we have a responsibility to maintain, we are bringing the judiciary to operate in the dangerous waters of politics. Clear cases of stray abuses can go to court, and why not? But where there is this massive and state organised rape on democracy, it is asking too much to ask Tribunals to address a self-inflicted wound.

My party has a stand on the elections generally and the Chairman of the party, Chief Don Etiebet, will make a statement. But I decided to address you before many would accuse me of being a bad loser. I am a sportsman and should act as one. Sports are regulated by rules which must be kept. Politics has rules the world over. In Nigeria, we cannot rewrite the rules or breach shamelessly the guidelines which were issued for the conduct of the 2003 elections. The two elections conducted by INEC on April 12 and 19 have shown that the rules and guidelines were meant to be broken. This is not a good sign for our democracy, and those who love this country can only weep for the wrongs that have been committed, and hope that free, fair and credible elections can be held in the next few weeks.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank most sincerely all members of The Buhari Organisation (TBO) nationwide for demonstrating a high level of commitment and patriotism. This was a group of Nigerians who formed the nucleus of the struggle at the stage when so many were afraid or skeptical. We have reached this through their commitment and loyalty; and thank God for giving them the will and the courage.

I will also thank my party, the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) for recognizing my ability and thus giving me the ticket around which this project is being piloted. I would also like to thank the millions of Nigerians for answering our call and demonstrating tremendous support in all areas I visited either on consultations or campaign. Nigerians have proved to the world that politics is not about buying people. We have no money, and did not give anybody anything, yet we have enjoyed unprecedented support and love, far ahead of those who paraded themselves with money.

I am ending this address by expressing my high regard and respect to Nigerian voters for coming out to vote. Unfortunately the system has denied them the right to translate such votes into getting the government of their choice. I also extend my sympathy to those who were denied the chance to vote; some were beaten and even killed in the process, and many more still under detention. To you all I share the pain with you and I do believe God will bring down justice in the end.

Certainly the country is cheated. Millions are injured both bodily and in their hearts. I therefore leave everything in the hands of our Party on whose platform I contested to take all necessary legal and constitutional actions to redress this grievous crime.

Meanwhile I advise all our supporters to massively participate in the next Houses of Assembly elections. Thereafter, they should await our further advice in respect of the illegalities and fraud foisted on Nigeria and its citizens.

I thank you for your attention.

April 2003

TEXT OF PRESS BRIEFING DELIVERED BY THE ANPP PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE GEN. MUHAMMADU BUHARI (RTD.) ON THE OUTCOME OF THE APRIL 19 ELECTION ON WEDNESDAY, APRIL 23, 2003 AT

HILTON HOTEL, ABUJA