

Communiqué Issued At The End Of Special Meeting Of The Leaders Of SBCHROs & Other Invited Special Persons On:

Insecurity & Human Rights Abuses In Southeast And Threats Facing The 2019 Gen Polls In Nigeria

(Onitsha Nigeria: 11th December 2018)-Leaders of the South East based Coalition of Human Rights and Democracy Organizations, **SBCHROs**, held a special meeting/session in Onitsha, Anambra State last Sunday to study, analyze and take informed position on matters of insecurity and “industrial scale” human rights abuses in the Region and threats facing the 2019 General Elections in Nigeria. The special meeting/session was also called on account of the 70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR), globally marked yesterday, 10th December 2018. The UDHR was proclaimed on 10th December 1948.

The meeting was special, seminal and cerebral; with most of the leaders of the **SBCHROs** in attendance, in addition to invitation and attendance of **persons of expertise** or specially invited persons drawn from academia, legal profession, media industry, religious organizations, Igbo Think-Tank, business community, computer engineering, military profession, human rights community; electoral advocacy, research and demography; and persons living with visual impairment, etc. Experts on anti poll rigging using ICT as well as PVCs distribution and Card Reader management were also invited.

The meeting commenced and lasted throughout the evening into the late night of Saturday, 8th December 2018; continued and concluded on Sunday, 9th December 2018. The highlight of the special meeting was presentation by the leadership of **Int’l Society for Civil Liberties & the Rule of Law-INTERSOCIETY** of an **80-page special report on “Nigerian Military Massacre Operations in Eastern Nigeria (August 2015-September 2017)”**; attached with **“80-page pictorial album of victims of the massacre operations”**. The **Special Report** also contained **“Economic Losses of the Nigerian Military Massacre Operations in Southeast & Igbo Delta (August 2015-December 2018-40months)”**.

The **special report**, researched and authored by Emeka Umeagbalasi, a **criminologist and graduate of security studies** with expertise in **peace studies and conflict resolution**, has inputs from local and international academicians and legal luminaries; with the researcher/author aided by eight-member research assistants. The **research work** which comes on stream in coming days or weeks; was generally adopted by SBCHROs for local, national, regional and global campaigns and other strategic actions.

Deliberations & Resolutions: The coalition meticulously and forensically brainstormed on the above highlighted thorny issues and came up with various resolutions. One of the resolutions was the imperative need for the emancipation of the Igbo nation from the shackles of political oppression, exclusion, segregation and persecution in Nigeria or any part thereof. The coalition called for more and active participation and involvement of People of the Igbo Nation State in political or democratic process in Nigeria especially the 2019 general polls.

The coalition further observed with dismay the present militarization of the political process and landscape in Nigeria particularly militarization or military and police siege on old Eastern Nigeria or Southeast Region, Rivers and Delta States-two States with approximately 60% and 40% Igbo populations respectively. Such situation which has already compromised army neutrality in the democratic process; coupled with its brazen lopsided composition, has wrecked untold havoc on the people and their properties in the affected Region or areas as well as in the Nigeria's electoral system.

Igbo people in various parts of the country or outside Igbo land have also been found to be in serious dilemma over what becomes of their fate during the 2019 general elections amidst difficulties of voters' cards transfer as well as intra or inter personal threats surrounding their forced or voluntary resolve to relocate to their home states during the exercise. The coalition took a careful appraisal of the dilemma especially as it concerns possible mass return of the Igbo people living in Northern Nigeria during the polls owing to fear of losing their lives and properties, especially judging from the sad experience of the 2011 post election violence in the North.

The coalition found the likelihood of non-repetition of such sad incident in Northern Region during the 2019 general polls; particularly owing to the fact that the 2019 Presidential Poll is largely "north versus north" affair. That notwithstanding, the coalition called for increased unbiased security presence, intelligence and patrol in all areas of Northern Nigeria particularly in areas dominated by citizens of Igbo and other non Igbo origins. Igbo citizens living in Northern Nigeria as well as other eligible voting citizens of Nigeria must be protected and allowed to vote for candidates of their choice and conscience during the 2019 general polls.

The coalition advised all Igbo citizens in Northern Nigeria who have registered or obtained their PVCs in their areas of residence to stay back and vote for candidates of their choice and conscience while those not yet registered or those who have successfully transferred their PVCs to Eastern Nigeria through "voter's card transfer"; are free to return to their ancestral region or homes to vote or observe the polls.

The coalition strongly identified and deliberated on palpable fears over the possible implementation or repetition of scientific election rigging during the 2019 elections especially in the Presidential Poll. Amidst widespread reports of tampering with card readers, collection of vital information from PVCs of eligible voters such as PVC pin or code numbers, alleged deletion from the National Register of Voters of location or venue, dates and time of voting and results, "front-loading" of bought or procured PVCs on election day as "valid cast votes", alleged scanning and forwarding of many Southeast PVCs from INEC regional data to its central data with mischievous intents; the tradermoni program of the FG reportedly exchanged with collection of voters' PVCs or their PVC code numbers, among other scientific rigging tricks deployed; these fears are real and constitute part of "vote buying" and "scientific rigging plans" appeared set in motion for rigging the 2019 general polls.

This is more so when the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has consistently maintained “North-South disparity” in its voters’ registration, PVCs issuance and distribution as well as use of Card Reader during polls. In the 2015 general polls, for instance, use of Card Reader was made strict in the South and relaxed in the North, to the extent that up to 13.5 million votes were strongly reported or generated outside the use of Card Reader; leading to “no single record of invalid vote” in most of the Northern Nigeria—a home to millions of persons living with visual and physical impairment and stark illiteracy.

During registration of voters including continuous voters registration, hundreds of thousands, if not millions of under-age children were registered as “voters” in Northern Nigeria and allowed to vote undetected in the 2015 general polls with all their votes counted and recorded as “valid votes”. The National Register of Voters still contains hundreds of thousands, if not millions of such names till date. This is coupled with INEC refusal to allow for electronic voting in Nigeria to exist side by side with manual voting.

As clearly seen in recent Ekiti and Osun governorship polls, INEC has introduced another style of electronic rigging whereby in its desperate bid to return its favored party or candidates in election, poll results are ordered cancelled in its favored or disfavored party or its candidates’ strongholds noted with little or no hitches so as to manipulate its rerun by any means possible. This is usually the case when its disfavored party and its candidates are maintaining reasonable lead. The coalition called for concrete and urgent steps to be taken to systematically expose and destroy the highlighted despicable practices of INEC and other criminal political players. Any attempt to repeat the INEC sharp practices highlighted above can set the country on fire; capable of intractable ruination of the country.

Voter apathy was identified by the coalition as one of the banes hindering Nigeria’s democratic growth and found to be chronic in Southeast Region, owing to long periods of failed promises and brazen truncation of the wishes of the electorates after elections in Nigeria including the Southeast Region, in addition to militarization of poll process and election insecurity. Voter apathy among Nigerians particularly in the South East Region has increased with great speed. It is also found to have been compounded in recent times by the exponents of “poll boycott or poll shut down” or “Biafra referendum”.

After exhaustive deliberation on the issue, the coalition came to the conclusion that exponents of “poll boycott” or “poll shutdown”; many, if not most of them non-bearers of PVCs, are free to preach their messages provided they are devoid of threats or violence; allowing PVC bearers to willingly exercise their civic rights of voting for candidates of their choice during the 2019 general polls particularly in the governorship and the presidential polls.

As globally established, it is both criminal offence and breach of citizen’s fundamental human rights for any state actor (security agent or public office holder) or non state actor (non security operative or non public office holder) to prevent, stampede, threaten, induce, attack or stop any registered voter or citizen from voting on election day. Right to vote is so sacred and inviolable that plebiscite or referendum is made an integral part of same.

The coalition called on Nigerian security agencies to desist from cracking down on those campaigning for “poll boycott” or “poll shutdown”. Where they turn violent and target registered voters or members of the general public, the security agencies are strongly advised to use modern methods of crowd control to get them dispatched or restored normalcy. Security intelligence should be maximally deployed and used to track down any person or group of persons that engage in art of violent crimes during such street campaigns.

Reckless use of criminal labeling and collateral violence by the Nigerian security agencies against innocent members of the Nigerian public particularly the unarmed and defenseless pro Biafra campaigners must be avoided. Security agencies were also reminded by the coalition that group or individual violence and its management is still globally governed by proportionality of use of force and any form of derogation associated with same is intolerable and punishable.

The coalition also deplored the increasing monetization of the political space by the present federal administration and subtle shutting down of the media space giving no room for constructive criticisms and other forms of democratic free speeches as clearly provided in the Constitution and international rights treaties acceded or ratified by Nigeria. The voices and votes of all Nigerians, irrespective of tribe, region, class or gender must be allowed to count all times particularly in the 2019 general polls.

The coalition further received with shock; deliberated and condemned without reservation the unpronounced decimation of the South East from the military circle through biased postings to hot spots in the insurgency ravaged parts of the North East. Many, if not most of the Igbo bright chaps in the military drafted even from the Engineering regiment to war zones have been dying in droves with the casualty figures not made public or intentionally underreported. Totality of these has further led to mass exodus of young Igbo military officers from the military; forcing them into forced and unceremonious retirement. The partisan disposition of security chiefs and security agencies in Nigeria is a serious threat to the country and presents danger to country’s democracy particularly its 2019 general elections.

The coalition strongly condemned the unspeakable partisanship and bias of Anti graft agencies and their Chiefs who were reportedly caught or seen attending political rallies of Mr. President, wear epaulets/badges of Mr. President’s reelection materials or affiliated political party. These they reportedly do with reckless abandon; giving room to unspeakable hounding and harassment of perceived political opponents. The Presidency has also let loose on political opposition using EFCC, ICPC and covert and overt security agencies; hiding under the cover of “fighting corruption”.

A clear case in point was ongoing barrage of attacks, harassments and fiscal violence the security and anti graft agencies have let loose on vice presidential candidate of the main opposition party in the 2019 Presidential Polls, Mr. Peter Obi and members of his family. These included recent report of freezing of his legitimate banks accounts. Since he left office as meritorious and achiever governor of Anambra State over four years ago (17th March 2014), there have been no credible records of Mr. Peter Obi being under EFCC or ICPC investigation. He is the only governor in the history of Nigeria to have left tens of billions of naira in cash in the State coffers without incurring debts or leaving debts that are greater than cash and investments left.

It is totally correct to say that the Igbo political leaders/South East Governors have abandoned the People of their Region in pursuit of selfish political goals particularly quest to remain in office or facilitate their succession by cronies and puppets; all at the expense of collective security and wellbeing of the Igbo People and their Region. The silence and inaction of the Igbo political leaders/Southeast Governors in the midst of the above highlighted attacks and second colonization is capable of unseating those of them contesting for second term in office. The human rights records of the present Governors of Anambra and Abia States are nothing to write about.

The coalition condemned in strongest term the above highlighted misconducts of the Igbo political leaders/Southeast Governors who are now puppets of the Northern Oligarchy and have sold off the collective security of the Region. Also totally condemned by the coalition is their unholy alliance with President Buhari who they now work for or selfishly poised at returning for second tenure; at great expense of the general interests and wellbeing of the People of the Region including mortgaging the security of the Region in the hands of civilian, uniformed and militantly armed Fulani jihadists.

The Coalition also deliberated on refusal of Mr. President to assent to the amended Electoral Act and saw it as a pointer to the fact that the Presidency is likely up to some sinister plots to undermine and destabilize the 2019 elections. Knowing fully that the required 90 days for the National Assembly to veto the bill into law will not elapse before the general elections, the coalition called on Nigerians to rise up and demand that Mr. President do the right thing by assenting to that bill; failure of which the Administration should be voted out including being held responsible should anything untoward happens to the 2019 General Polls.

Finally, the coalition viewed with shock and dismay the recent comments credited to former Governor Raji Fashola of Lagos who is now the Federal Minister of Power etc and former interloper Governor of Anambra State, Dr. Chris Ngige; calling for the return of Nigeria's Presidency to Southwest in 2023. While former Governor Fashola urged Southwest People to vote for the present central Government in the 2019 Presidential Poll so as to guarantee the return of the Southwest to the Presidency of the country in 2023, the former Anambra interloper Governor deceitfully urged the Igbo People to vote for same or lose the chance of "producing President of Nigeria in 2023".

In the North, then Rep but now Senator Gumau Yahaya representing the Bauchi South Senatorial District had in August 2018 disclosed that "his only mission in the Senate is to make Buhari life President of Nigeria". It is still unclear which of the Buahris he wanted or wants to "make Nigeria's life President in 2023". The contradictions inherent in the statements above highlighted are clear indication of how dishonest, parochial, cunning and desperate Nigerian politicians can be in matters of politics in Nigeria or when seeking for elective offices.

The coalition urged eligible voters of the Southeast and the entire Igbo Nation to ignore such deceitful comments or statements. Igbo People must resist any attempt to perpetuate the current Presidency of Nigeria in power beyond 2023 if it credibly wins the 2019 Presidential Poll or return any other Region other than Southeast to the Presidency of the country.

It is either Igbo Presidency in the next dispensation with *re-constitutionalisation* of the country or a referendum for total separation. The only non tradable condition for Igbo Nation State to remain in Nigeria beyond 2023 is allowing and supporting the Region to take a short at the country's Presidency in the next political dispensation.

Signed

For: Southeast Based Coalition of Human Rights & Democracy Organizations (SBCHROs)

- **Int'l Society for Civil Liberties & the Rule of Law (Emeka Umeagbalasi & Barr Chidinma Udegbonam)**
- **CLO, Southeast Zone (Comrade Aloysius Emeka Attah)**
- **CLO, Anambra State Branch (Comrade Vincent Ezekwueme & Comrade Chidi Mbah)**
- **Forum for Promotion of National Ethos & Values (FPNEV) (Rep)**
- **Igbo Ekunie Initiative (Rep)**
- **Int'l Solidarity for Peace & Human Rights Initiative (ISPHRI) (Jerry Chidozie Chukwuokoro, PhD)**
- **Foundation for Environmental Rights, Advocacy & Dev (FENRAD) (Comrade Nana Nelson Nwafor)**
- **Society for Economic Rights & Social Justice (SERSj) (Andy Ndukwe)**
- **Human Rights Organization of Nigeria (HRON) (Comrade Samuel Njoku)**
- **Center for Human Rights & Peace Advocacy (CHRAP) (Comrade Peter Onyegiri & Happiness Ezinwa)**
- **Southeast Good Governance Forum (SEGGF) (Rep)**
- **Society Watch & Advocacy Project (of Intersociety)-WASP (Comrade Chike Umeosonwunne)**
- **Initiative for Ideal Dev & Emancipatory Leadership in Nigeria (IDEAL) (Comrade Nwokocha Anozie Innocent)**
- **Igbo National Council (INC) (Comrade Chilos A.C. Godsent & Comrade Zulu Ofoelue)**
- **Anambra Human Rights Forum (ANHRF) (Barr Obianuju Igboeli)**
- **Voice of the Voiceless Int'l (VOVI) (Barr Violet Umenwofor-Ezekwike)**
- **Easy Life Initiative for Rural Youths (ELIRY) (Comrade Emeku Uche)**
- **Igbo Bu Igbo Organization (Rep)**
- **Community Empowerment Network (Rep)**
- **Southeast Movement against Transactional Politics & Profligacy (Comrade Bright Obidike)**

Other Special Persons In Attendance

- **Engineer Ike Nwandu (Computer Engineering)**
- **Architect Eric Eyituche (ADF, Enugu)**
- **Barr Capt Casmir Nwafor (Military Profession)**
- **Prof Justice Chidi (Academia)**
- **Engr. Chinweike Ajanobi (Hydro Geology Profession)**
- **Barristers Justus Uche Ijeoma and S.N. Okonkwo (Legal Profession)**
- **Anayo Okoli (Print Media Profession)**
- **Isaac Umunna (Online Media Profession)**
- **Titus (Tai) Obasi (Social Media Profession)**
- **Miracle Chukwu-UNIZIK (Person Living With Visual Impairment)**
- **Amarachi Nwokedi-UNIZIK (Person Living With Visual Impairment)**
- **Ekwutosi Ezenwa-UNIZIK(Physically Challenged)**
- **Dennis Ezeokoli, Ekene Nzeadu, Tochukwu Ibegbu, Promise Ndukwe, etc (Business Profession)**

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