



PREVENTING FURTHER DISASTER IN THE NEXT IMO ELECTIONS

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OWERRI, NIGERIA -

A Press Release by the Catholic Archbishop of Owerri, the Most Rev. Anthony J. V. Obinna, given on the 28th of February, 2019. Villa Assumpta, Owerri.

In proximate preparation for the 2019 elections in Nigeria, we, the Catholic Church in Owerri Archdiocese organized, on Friday the 18th January 2019, a special day of Prayer for Peaceful Elections. Along with Catholics, other Christians and people of goodwill across Nigeria, we also participated in a three-day prayer and fasting just before the Presidential and National Assembly elections. Although the results of these elections have been released, reports about how they were conducted in various locations, bordering on highhanded intimidation, massive rigging and violence, have raised serious alarm about the forthcoming Governorship and House of Assembly elections.

Of particular concern is Imo State where, for nearly one year, the desperation for electoral political office had assumed a do-or-die posture. Up till today, the disarray, the hurts and pains that ensued from those skewed and unhealthy party primaries and congresses are still felt and talked about. It is this very sad political situation that now turned into a disaster for the true democratic process that we have been struggling to nurture and develop for Imo State.

Details of the disaster that hit the last elections include the monetized compromise of certain core INEC, adhoc and security staff by politicians, political parties and their agents in distorting actual voting, accurate counting and

impartial announcement of election results leading, in some cases, to violence and the burning down of polling and collation centres in Imo State. Particularly worrisome is the behaviour of incumbent government officials, electoral candidates and highly placed politicians who use official law enforcement personnel and political thugs to intimidate the electorate, legitimate electoral workers and certified observers. The case of the FUTO Professor who served as the collation officer for the Orlu Senatorial election, and who confessed to have announced the results “under duress” is now well known to the Imo and Nigerian public. One other professor who served with a university colleague as collation officers in a Local Government Area in Imo State personally narrated how they “narrowly escaped with their lives” during the last elections.

Given that the forthcoming elections on the 9th March may even evoke more desperate conduct by politicians from over seventy parties, we call upon the Imo electorate and the entire citizenry of Imo State to rise up to the patriotic challenge of making our elections free, fair and credible because of our long term commitment to good governance and democracy. In spite of disappointments with the last elections, we still encourage all PVC holders in Imo State not to be dispirited but to troop out in their numbers to cast their votes, not in the spirit of mammon – money inducement -, but in the Godly spirit of genuine concern and care for all Imo people. We challenge the Imo electorate to vote in candidates who are likely to serve our people and State with a sense of fairness and equity, peace and joy. As we bring a sense of integrity, love and responsibility to our electoral engagement, we discourage the intimidatory and despotic tendencies that bring disaster to the political process. We therefore demand that every politician, every party or security agent, every INEC officer – permanent or adhoc, and every government official respects and protects the God-given dignity of every Imo citizen. We will be preventing further disaster in the forthcoming Imo elections if all involved including every other Imo citizen, comply with the above imperative. Failure to do so would be criminal and sinful; nobody, no matter how highly placed, commits crimes and sins and just gets away with it. Therefore in a spirit of repentance for electoral sins and evils already perpetrated, we humbly ask for God’s forgiveness and mercy.

Fortunately our State elections are taking place during the Holy Season of Lent. We urge for a fresh resolution and commitment on the part of everyone, especially politicians, INEC, security operatives and government, to ensure free, fair and credible elections in our State come the 9th March, 2019. We invite all Catholics, other Christians and

people of goodwill to join in the three-day prayer and fasting from Ash Wednesday 6th to Friday 8th March, leading to the elections.

May God, the Owner of every soul, safeguard us all and our electoral process! O Mary Mother of Mercy, pray for us!

Signed:

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Most Rev. Anthony J. V. Obinna

Archbishop of Owerri