



NIGERIAN BAR ASSOCIATION

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POSTPONEMENT OF ELECTIONS

1. The Nigerian Bar Association is confounded by and disappointed with the postponement by the Independent National Electoral Commission (“INEC”), in the wee hours of this morning, of the elections that were scheduled to hold today, 16 February 2019 and on 02 March 2019. We are confounded by the postponement, considering the serial assurances that INEC had, prior to this morning, given of its preparedness for the conduct of the elections; INEC had also expressly assured that postponement of the elections was not howsoever in contemplation. Our disappointment is compounded by the fact that none of the reasons that INEC has proffered justifies the postponement; all the reasons, with some diligence, could have been remediated.

2. It was particularly unkind for INEC to announce the postponement only hours to the opening of the polls for the national elections today, knowing as we all do that most Nigerians register for elections in their States of origin and had traveled there from their various stations to exercise their civic rights. The cost in manhours, resources and inconveniences cannot be readily quantified not to mention the risk to personal safety. Worse, we run the risk that some who may have to return to their work stations early next week may not be able to travel again for the rescheduled polls next weekend. We read the INEC announcement and listened to its broadcast to hear how INEC intends to mitigate that possibility and nothing was said in that regard.

3. INEC needs to be reminded that a free, fair and credible election starts with the preparations therefor by the Electoral Commission. If the Commission is unable to exercise its functions without avoidable glitches, it is difficult to see how it could justifiably impose sanctions on infracting political parties who give excuses for their infractions similar to the ones that INEC has given today for the postponement of the elections. Regulatory authorities such as INEC require discipline and foresightedness to carry out their functions. It is only by imbibing those twin virtues,

NATIONAL OFFICERS:

Paul Usoro, SAN President;

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amongst others and showing same by conduct that they can justifiably sanction infracting parties over whom they exercise regulatory control.

4. NBA hopes that the new dates of 23 February 2019 and 09 March 2019 for the rescheduled elections are sacrosanct and the preparations therefor will be foolproof and glitch-free. Our democracy can only prosper and be strengthened if our electoral umpire does not give room for disputation of election results through sloppy arrangements and inadequate preparations. Our elections can only be adjudged free, fair and credible if INEC does not give room for speculations or concerns about its readiness and preparations for the elections. Nigerians can only have faith in the electoral process if, amongst others, there is no room for suppositions as to the motives – hidden, ulterior or unknown – of INEC for taking certain actions, including but not limited to the postponement of elections.

5. In concluding, we urge Nigerians not to give up or tire out. We must give INEC the benefit of the doubt and turn out in our numbers to vote for the parties of our choice on the rescheduled dates for the elections i.e. 23 February 2019 and 09 March 2019. As the NBA pointed out in its 2019 New Year Message:

“This is the year that we would decide both at the national and States levels how we wish to be governed and into whose hands we will entrust our affairs and lives . . . The decisions of our rulers directly impact and determine the course of our lives. It determines the quality of our lives, not only from an economic standpoint but also from our health, longevity and developmental standpoints. Our decisions at the polls will determine the quality of life for our youths and children from an educational prism as well as from the perspectives of employment and self-development opportunities. The quality of rulers that we will vote into power this year will determine whether we move from a perennially consumptive economy into a productive and hopefully an industrialized economy; it would determine whether we would, in our lifetimes ever be assured of such basic necessities like pervasive energy supply and provision of potable water and primary health care for our citizens. The Elections of 2019 should and must therefore serve as a defining moment for our country.”

Paul Usoro, SAN
President