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IPOB cancels 'sit-at-home', asks Anambrarians to vote tomorrow

• Security concerns heighten as gunmen kill six policemen 48 hours to election • Southeast govts: Criminals using IPOB's name to kill innocent citizens • Governorship candidates sign peace agreement • IGP orders restriction of vehicular movement • CDD warns security agencies against violation of voters' rights • Bianca writes late husband, Ojukwu, asks him to hold Obiano responsible if APGA fails to win

From Lawrence Njoku, Uzoma Nzeagwu, Osiberoha Osibe (Awka) and Odita Sunday (Abuja)

AMID the brewed mix of fear and optimism ahead tomorrow's governorship election in Anambra State, the outlawed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) last night cancelled the one-week sit-at-home order it issued across the Southeast. IPOB said it called off the order after consultations with elders, traditional and religious leaders from the region. The group's Director of Media and Publicity, Emma Powerful, made this disclosure in a statement. He stated that it is not IPOB's intention to add to the pains of the people it claims to fight for since all business activities would be brought to a halt with the sit-at-home order.

The spokesperson said: "Following the genuine intervention of our elders, esteemed traditional institutions/rulers and religious leaders, and after due consideration of the positive impacts of their engagement, and sequel to the fact that our elders have spoken in our terms, the leadership of IPOB, ably led by Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, hereby and immediately call off the one-week sit-at-home earlier declared to commence November 5 to November 10.

"We have equally considered several appeals by our mothers who earn their living based on their daily economic activities, which will obviously be affected if Biafraland is locked down for one whole week. It's never our intention to add to the pains of our people, hence our decision to suspend the sit-at-home.

"IPOB leadership is only in-

terested in our referendum and peaceful agitation for self-determination, and cannot by under any guise be seen to be interfering with any electoral process.

"The people of Anambra should go out *en-masse* and peacefully exercise their franchise on Saturday and accordingly, chose a leader of their choice. They should not be intimidated by anybody, group of persons or security agents.

"Credible intelligence available to us confirm that security agencies have concluded arrangement to deploy a group of armed persons to unleash mayhem on our people and attribute the killing to IPOB members. "Anambrarians should vote and standby to protect their votes. No rigging of any kind will be tolerated. It must be transparent, free and fair to all.

"We, therefore, urge all Biafrans and residents of Biafra to go about their lawful businesses without fear of any molestations. All agents of darkness recruited by our enemies to inflict pain on our people under the guise of enforcing the sit-at-home are hereby warned to steer clear or brace up for the consequences of their evil action."

BEFORE the volte-face by IPOB, it had been days and weeks of uncertainty despite assurances by government and stakeholders that security will be guaranteed before, during and after the election.

In fact, tension and disquiet have gripped security operatives who are on election duty in the state as six of their colleagues were reportedly killed by unknown gunmen, yesterday. The gunmen were said to have attacked the po-

licemen in two separate police formations in the early hours of Thursday. Several others also sustained gunshot injuries.

It was gathered that the hoodlums attacked the Mobile 16 Police Force and the Area Command headquarters respectively, at Oraifite Town, Ekwusigbo local coun-

cil of the state, dampening the morale of security operatives gearing up for tomorrow's election and heightening anxiety among residents.

Oraifite is about 46km to the capital, Awka. It was further gathered that the hoodlums also made away with the dead officers' weapons.

The casualties were recorded after heavy gun-battle, which lasted hours, as the policemen confronted the unidentified gunmen who stormed the stations in many vehicles.

Commissioner of Police in the state, Mr. Echeng Echeng could not be reached for comment on the incident.

Also, the Zone 13 Public Relations Officer, DSP Nkeiruka Nwude, who is in charge of election matters, did not respond to enquiries on the incident.

HOWEVER, the Southeast Governors' Forum has said criminals were using

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APGA candidate for Anambra gubernatorial election, Prof. Charles Soludu (left); Bishop, Catholic Diocese of Sokoto/Secretary, National Peace Committee (NPC), Bishop Matthew Kukah; PDP candidate, Valentine Ozigbo; APC candidate, Chief Andy Uba; Chairman of NPC, Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar (rid); YPP candidate, Ifeanyi Ubah and Chairman, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Prof. Mahmood Yakubu at the signing of Peace Accord with candidates of political parties for the forthcoming election, in Awka, Anambra...yesterday. PHOTO: NAN



Members, Board of Trustees, Women in Management, Business and Public Service (WIMBIZ), Mrs. Ifeoma Idigbe (left); Mrs. Onobola Johnson; Mrs. Ibukun Awosika; Mrs. Yowande Zacheaus; Chairman, Board of Trustees, Ifeanyi Ubah; Conference Chairman, Lady Maiden Alex-Ibru; Keynote Speaker, Fola Adeola; Conference Chairman, Chief Folake Solanke (SAN); Mrs. Morin Desalu; Mrs. Mairo Bashir; Mrs. Julia Oku Jacks; Mrs. Adoola Azeez and Mrs. Toyin Olawoye at the 2021 WIMBIZ Conference on "Celebrating Legacy" at the 20th anniversary in Lagos...yesterday. PHOTO: FEMI ADEBESIN-KUTI

Panel insists police produce officers allegedly linked to extrajudicial killing

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Security concerns heighten as gunmen kill six policemen 48 hours to election

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the name of IPOB to kill innocent citizens. The Forum said this while calling on security agencies to secure the citizens and the election. This was disclosed in a statement issued by the governor of Ebonyi State and Chairman, Southeast Governors' Forum, David Umahi, yesterday.

The statement read in part: "We plead with all security agencies deployed for Anambra election to please secure the lives of our people in Anambra while playing within the rules of their engagements."

"We are aware that the insecurity in Southeast has gone beyond IPOB. Cultists, armed robbers and kidnappers have recruited themselves and are using the name of IPOB to kill innocent citizens. We will not allow this to continue."

"We thank the Federal Government and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) for their determination to hold the election. We will give them every support and shall help them to ensure a free, fair and violence-free election. We, therefore, ask our people to go out and vote for candidates of their choice as we have been assured of adequate security measures to secure their lives and property."

GOVERNORSHIP candidates for the poll, yesterday, signed a peace agreement in Awka. Those who were present and signed the agreement include Mr. Valentine Ozigbo of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Senator Andy Uba of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Dr. Obiora Okonkwo of the Zenith Labour Party (ZLP), Prof. Chukwuma Soludo of the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) and Dr. Godwin Maduka of the Accord Party, among others.

The peace accord signing ceremony was at the Dora Akunyili Women Development Centre, Awka, and was facilitated by the National Peace Committee, Abuja, headed by former head of state, General Abdulsalami Abubakar (rtd).

Chairman of INEC, Prof. Mahmood Yakubu, while addressing the flag-bearers, observed that without peace, the deployment plans, innovations in result management, safety of personnel, security of materials and above all, credibility of the election will be undermined. He gave the assurance that the Commission was committed to conducting a transparent and credible election in Anambra.

In his address, Abubakar said the signing of the peace accord was a way of reaffirming that they must conduct themselves in a professional and peaceful manner ahead

of the election. Abdulsalami appealed to concerned stakeholders to cooperate with INEC and security agencies for a free and fair exercise.

In his speech, the Inspector-General of Police, Mr. Usman Baba Alkali, represented by DIG in charge of Operation, Mr. Zaki Ahmed, said that peace must be maintained before, during and after the election.

Others who were present at the signing were Bishop of Sokoto Diocese, Hassan Kukah, state security chiefs, party state chairmen, supporters and traditional rulers.

ANAMBRA at the moment could be said to be highly militarised. There are at least 34,000 police operatives mobilised for the election, excluding soldiers, civil defence operatives, DSS officers and other security personnel. At every major junction in the state, there is a detachment of joint security forces armed to the teeth.

This is aside several patrol vans driving in long convoy on the streets and blaring heavy sirens to announce their presence. In each of the convoy is a patrol van dedicated to sniffer dogs and a Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) ambulance with an armoured tanker. At some locations considered as flashpoints, armoured tankers are stationed there.

The heightened security presence is connected with series of threats over the election, especially from secessionist groups in the Southeast region.

For instance, members of the Biafra National Guard (BNG), a pseudo group claiming to be speaking for IPOB, have vowed that nothing will make the election hold tomorrow, insisting that the disruption of the election is part of the processes to actualise Biafra's sovereignty.

Exacerbating the confusion in the state are unverified videos in circulation on social media, coupled with statements and counter statements by various groups for and against the conduct of the exercise.

Inside the streets of Anambra, however, residents are freely going about their legitimate activities. The motor parks are a beehive of activities with many moving in and out of the state. The state government had Tuesday announced two days public holiday for Thursday and Friday to enable civil servants travel to their areas of registration to cast their votes.

The markets are not spared as they are filled with people making last minute purchases in preparation for the days ahead. The petrol stations began to witness high patronage after its operators declared that they won't sell products after Thursday.

The Guardian, which went round some areas in Anambra, discovered that it was a

mixed feeling by residents over their participation in the election, even as there was calm in most areas.

At Aguata local council, which is the home of three leading governorship candidates: Prof Chukwuma Soludo of APGA, Valentine Ozigbo of PDP and Senator Andy Uba of APC, everywhere looked peaceful.

When The Guardian visited the Ilesia country home of Soludo, yesterday morning, he said he was in a hurry to get to Awka, the capital, for a scheduled meeting of all gubernatorial candidates. It was at the Awka meeting brokered by Catholic Bishop of Sokoto, Rev Fr. Mathew Kukah, that the peace accord was signed.

It was gathered that the community last night used town criers to advise its people to keep calm, be close to their homes, and quickly go to vote and thereafter return.

At INEC office in Awka, officials of the agency were seen making last minutes preparation for tomorrow's exercise. However, except those on official duties, movements were seriously restricted in the area, as well-kitted security officers were used to guard the office.

An official of the Commission said that INEC was prepared for the election, stressing that "we allocated our officials to also deal with cases relating to accreditation and others outside this complex to ward off visitors as well as control the security of the office."

MEANWHILE, apex Igbo socio-cultural organisation, Ohanaeze Ndigbo, has asked residents of the state to ensure they exercised their franchise in tomorrow's election.

In a statement signed by its National Publicity Secretary, Chief Alex Ogbornia, Ohanaeze said: "Ohanaeze Ndigbo Worldwide had earlier issued a statement urging the good people of Anambra to appreciate the need for full participation in the election. I am delighted that with time everybody, including the agitators, have seen the need for the election to hold in Anambra."

"Secondly, the presence of security operatives is not a source of threat but a confidence-building dynamic, aimed at reassuring the people that they are fully protected."

As part of measures aimed at protecting the sanctity of the electoral process, IGP Usman Alkali Baba has ordered the restriction of vehicular movement in and out of the state from 11:59p.m. today (Friday) to 11:59p.m. on Saturday.

The IGP noted that the restriction has become necessary following pointers from the election security threats assessments conducted by



Hajia Bola Shagaya (left); Chairman, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, Brig. Gen. Buba Marwa; FCT Minister, Mohammed Bello; Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Boss Mustapha; Chief of Staff to the President, Prof. Ibrahim Gambari and Chief of Staff to Adamawa State Governor, Prof. Maxwell Gidado at the public presentation of "Legacies of a Legend," Amb. Bamanga Tukur in Abuja...yesterday. PHOTO: PHILIP OJISUA

the police, which indicate a high likelihood of infiltration by criminally-minded individuals to the state, before, during and after the polls.

The IGP further noted that the measure would also avail security forces a firm grip of the state to checkmate the movement of political thugs and touts, and prevent the free flow, circulation and use of illicit arms and hard drugs throughout the election and beyond.

Baba urged INEC officials, accredited observers, journalists and other authorised officials to go about their lawful duties as it relates to the elections, provided they observe all relevant rules guiding their deployment, including visible display of their accreditation tags.

He acknowledged that police officers and other security personnel deployed for the election will be appropriately supervised to ensure they carry out their responsibilities in the most humane, firm and professional manner, especially, to emergency service providers such as firefighters and ambulance services.

THE Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) has warned security agencies deployed to Anambra to desist from violating the rights of residents and voters. CDD's team of election analysts, led by Prof. Jibrin Ibrahim, who addressed newsmen in Abuja, urged security agencies to protect voters and not scare them from exercising their electoral rights.

According to Jibrin, "security agencies have to ensure that their presence is uniquely to protect voters. There must not be violations of the rights of the people. It has been assured by the Inspector General of Police that the inter-agencies security network has been fully briefed and trained to respect the rights of citizens and voters. We believe that what is going to happen, but we will be in the watch out and if we notice any violation of the

rights of citizens and voters, we will take it up."

MEANWHILE, former Ambassador, Iyom Bianca Ojukwu, yesterday, wrote her late husband and ex-warlord, Ikemba Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, asking him to hold Governor Willie Obiano responsible should the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) fail to win Saturday's gubernatorial election.

Ojukwu until his death was the leader and founding member of APGA. On two occasions, he flew the presidential flag of the party during general elections.

In a posthumous birthday message she sent to Ojukwu, Bianca lamented the infractions that have become the lot of the party, leading to APGA losing its popularity and membership.

She insisted that what befell APGA was made possible by the level of infiltrations by people she described as "strange gods" who did not have the interest of the party at heart.

She addressed her husband thus: "Odum n'echie Igbo; it is with a heavy heart that I make this communication with your noble soul, now resident in the heavenly realms, on this occasion of your birthday anniversary, and literally on the eve of the gubernatorial elections in your beloved state, Anambra. "I am filled with concern and anxiety about the current state of the legacy you left us...our party, APGA. Today, I hear the bells tolling, and the chimes send shivers down my spine."

"Today, chaos reigns supreme in our once stable party; our party faithful are despondent and embittered; and many of them have taken their fate in their own hands by bolting away from our party like rats desert a sinking ship."

"Some years ago, a carefree former banker called Obiano together with his locust men hijacked our political habitat and plundered and destroyed the house you toiled night and day to build. They

brought in their strange gods and made desperate party aspirants bow before them in a macabre dance of initiation."

"Ikemba Ndi Igbo, you stood for justice and equity, and fought relentlessly for the protection of your people, for the poor and the down-trodden, yet, these party leaders always chose to play dumb in any critical issue affecting our people, neither did they condemn the unjust imprisonment and wanton killings of their Igbo brothers."

"Nna Anyi, they removed your image from our party uniform, boldly labeling you a dead man who was no longer relevant, even to the beloved party you nurtured."

"Who is that Herod that seeks to erase your memory from this noble cause, this roll of honour, this last stand for Ndigbo in the twilight years of your life?"

"Arise, Odum n'echie Igbo...Arise on our behalf. May this Herod reap the harvest of his habitual treachery, and the first fruits of the turmoil he created as he literally sat back and watched as insecurity overran our space. May the one who seeks to erase your insignia and obscure your legacy suffer the same fate he strives to inflict on a man of honour; may he suffer the shame and humiliation he gratuitously dishes out to his fellows."

"Amuma n'Egbe Igwe, intercede for us. The eleventh hour is upon us. We are advancing into this electoral battlefield with untreated sores and bleeding wounds, but with our heads held high. Should we fail to make it, let it be on record that Willie Obiano destroyed APGA, an undeniable feat that will surely haunt him for the rest of his years. He will go down in history as the profligate who frittered away our collective patrimony. Happy Birthday, Odum n'echie Igbo, our hero. May you continue to enjoy a well merited rest in Heaven's land of the brave."