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Leadership (Abuja)**Nigeria: Turn of the Tide**

Hannatu Musawa

12 April 2011

Recommander

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The senatorial and House of Representatives elections that took place last week emerged as a surprising twist of events for a number of major political parties.

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Even though the initial events of the previous weeks had been discouraging, INEC seemed to have gone back to the drawing board to iron out numerous lapses that had previously marred the exercise. The sheer magnitude of conducting such an important event in the history of our country has been a challenging task from the beginning.

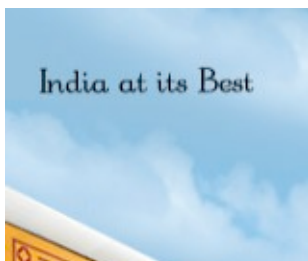
The amount of funds used, the millions employed as part of the workforce, and uncountable strategies adopted to make sure the voting commenced smoothly had been gargantuan in nature. Whether last week's election was conducted freely and fairly seems to be a subject of contention for some Nigerians as ballot box snatching has been reported sporadically all over the nation. On the most part though, I would personally like to commend INEC for at least making a commendable effort in restoring dignity and discipline to the electoral process in Nigeria.

From last weekend's result of the National Assembly elections, we can say that a wave of change has engulfed Nigerian politics. I am proud of my fellow countrymen and women who, despite some ferocious campaigning and coercion from some political parties, have decided to vote for change. No government is without failed policies or a poor implementation of those policies, but a party that has ruled the country for 12 years with little progress should not expect to be popular with the general majority of the country. A few years ago in our political history, it used to be that if you wanted to be elected into public office, you joined the ruling party, but now the tide has changed. As long as you are not contesting on the platform of the ruling party, then, you have a really great chance of winning. Alas, though, I now see a disturbing trend emerging from this: people are so desperate to get rid of a party that has let them down time and time again that they do not see beyond that party to the calibre of people being elected. The person that is representing a constituency should be conversant with the needs of his people and community as well as have the ability to be a good ambassador for his zone. A more credible candidate may be overlooked simply because he is bearing the flag of an unpopular or unknown party. Even more disturbing is the emerging trend of violence in Nigeria.

On Friday, April 8, 2011, a terrible bomb blast occurred, killing as many as eight people and injuring others. This senseless act of violence is evidence that an unknown group or groups of criminal minds are in sinister collusion to destroy the peace in our land. The government should take an enormous step to put an end to this violence immediately. If we can

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deliberate on whether or not to print ballot papers abroad or not, then, we can certainly afford to bring in international agencies to use sophisticated means to catch these culprits. Regrettably, Nigeria does not have the expertise nor the specially trained workforce to handle these bomb blasts with the finesse and forensic attention it warrants. Even though reports show that immediately after the blasts occurred road safety marshals, civil defence and the police were rushed to the scene, there has been, up till date, no concrete evidence to implicate any person or persons in the heinous crime. In the last months, there have been several acts of bloodshed in Borno State as well, and the shooting of innocent bystanders in the name of politics has become a regular affair.

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witnesses to the scene were furious at the incompetency of the officials and therefore began to riot. An angry mob reportedly burned down the Road Safety office and chaos followed. These reports are extremely disturbing, to say the least, and, sadly, they also seem to highlight the deploring level of incompetency that is a trend with certain authorities. If a Road Safety officer would never hesitate to stop people on the road for not wearing their seatbelts, then, what on earth would stop them from moving a tanker from a main highway using whatever means necessary? This spate of violence is not only restricted to civilians but, worryingly, to some officials as well. In [Kebbi in the Ka'oje district of Bagudo local government area](#), a mobile policeman opened fire on a group of citizens that were protesting vehemently an apparent shortage of election materials in the area. The result is that one man was killed, while another three were injured. The election never even took place as events had to be immediately brought to a halt. These acts of violence cannot even be described as random anymore; they have become menacingly frequent.

The upcoming presidential elections have to be monitored seriously and any lapse in terms of security operatives will result in an impending disaster. The government, though, should be commended for assigning all the various security agencies to the polling units. But it is not certain the amount of training and sensitization that these officers have received in terms of dealing with a large crowd of civilians attempting to exercise their constitutional right to vote. A soldier's first instinct at the spate of any violent attack is to protect and defend, and those rules become confusing when applied to civilian women and children.

Violence in any shape or form should not be condoned but the security agencies should be sensitised to interpret different situations and scenarios. While it is essential to protect the ballot boxes and maintain law and order at the same time, it is equally paramount to guard against any form of violent upheaval while the election is taking place. The idea is that they are also simply there to protect the good citizens of Nigeria and not to attack them unwittingly.

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The changes prevalent in Nigeria should not include these acts of terrorism but our people should prevail, weather the storm and make giant leaps and strides towards a renaissance that will give birth to a healthy and free democracy. The acceptance of this weekend's presidential

election results will be the start of this new revolution. Nigerians have great confidence in the distinguished gentlemen in the run for Aso Rock. In the now historic NN24 presidential debate, these men of honour displayed some of their finer qualities and characteristics in terms of policymaking and economic development of Nigeria. In hindsight, it was not a prudent decision for the president to have been absent at that exciting event. The aspirants had a forum to share and sell their goals and incentives with millions of curious and interested Nigerians and it was a wonder to watch. Each man had his own commendable mandate and I am hopeful that Nigeria will move progressively forward after the elections. The tide has turned and, hopefully, for the better. May it be peaceful and beneficial to us all.

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