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•Head for Tribunal

From Ike Abonyi in Katsina and Chuks Okocha in Abuja,
04.23.2007

The Action Congress (AC) presidential candidate, Vice President Atiku Abubakar has rejected the outcome of Saturday's presidential election arguing that it was more an arrangement by the ruling Peoples Democratic Party to foist a one party rule in the country.

His counterpart, the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) flag bearer, Major-General Muhammadu Buhari (rtd) has similarly rejected the results and called on his party members to collate evidence of malpractices preparatory to lodging a protest at the tribunal.

Atiku spoke to journalists at the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, Abuja yesterday upon his return to the nation's capital after casting his vote in his home state of Adamawa.

The Vice President said his party has never been interested in acquiring power through any extra-constitutional means.

He urged Nigerians not to be deceived arguing that the election held on Saturday was arranged to only happen in urban centres and state capitals to give the semblance of an election, saying over seventy percent of eligible voters could not vote.

Describing Saturday's election as the worst in the history of Nigeria, Atiku said: "I have never believed that the second round of elections was going to be anything different from the first, I have always predicted that it is going to be worse, and of course it proved our fears that it is the worst election ever seen", he said.

He alleged that a "symbolic election" was made to take place in the state capitals while no election took place anywhere else. "Seventy to 80 per cent of Nigerians live outside these urban areas, and if you disenfranchise these 70 to 80 per cent, what elections have you conducted", he asked.

Atiku alleged that thumb-printed ballot papers were distributed to Governors and various party agents, while result sheets were given to them for the purpose of having a favoured result.

He stressed that there would be no alternative to the cancellation of the elections, saying that no credible elections could be conducted under the present INEC.

He blamed INEC for not making what he called 'plan B', when it excluded his name from the ballot papers, saying that the commission was not transparent in the entire preparation for the polls.

While restating his readiness to challenge the outcome of the election at the election tribunals, the Atiku disclosed that the opposition parties soon meet to strategise on their next line of action. "We have already summoned an emergency meeting to discuss the election so that we can receive reports from all the opposition parties in the alliance, and then compare notes and move forward", he said.

He recalled that he warned ANPP on what would be the outcome of the polls, adding: "They have now seen what we told them was going to happen. They now have experienced it. There was completely no voting in Daura, people were protesting, and about five people were killed", the Vice President noted.

Speaking on the alleged plot by an unnamed presidential candidate in complicity with the senate President, Ken Nnamani to foil the declaration of the result and push for an interim government, Atiku said nobody is interested in that either in his party or among his associates.

He said what the opposition is saying is that outgoing President Olusegun Obasanjo and the Independent National Electoral Commission do not have the credibility to conduct an election that will reflect the will of the people.

The Vice President said he will be heading to the court soonest, to challenge the election declaring that he has faith in the judiciary in the country.

Text of the interview reads:

Q: From what we gathered from various parts of the country, there were elections, though marked by various malpractices. What is your reaction to this?

Atiku: Please don't be deceived, you were only in Yola. Yola is an urban centre. What actually the ruling party did was to have symbolic election in the capital cities and show it to Nigerians as if elections actually took place. More than 70 per

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cent of Nigerians live outside urban areas where no elections took place. I don't want you to be deceived. Election did take place. And even where election took place like Yola, where actually a different party won other than the ruling party, they changed the result to reflect the ruling party.

So elections did not take place in Nigeria, let nobody be deceived. We are now going to enter a new phase in our political history.

We are going to be faced with one party rule whether we like it or not. Then it will still be General Obasanjo who will be ruling this country.

Q: Will you accept the result of the election?

Atiku: I will not accept any result.

Q: The presidency said yesterday and accused the senate president of.....

Atiku: Forget about the issue of accusation. They said the Senate President or anybody else was contriving an interim government. We have never asked or advocated for any extra-constitutional means of governance. All what we are saying is that this President, this INEC lack the credibility, the impartiality to conduct a free and fair election for Nigerians to express their will.

Q: Something happened yesterday morning; a tanker loaded with combustible items headed towards the INEC office in Abuja and later in the afternoon we got a statement from Uba Sani saying a presidential candidate in connivance with the Senate President wanted to blow up INEC office.

Atiku: You would have known the reckless statement that comes out from Uba Sani. There is no iota of truth in it. They are not credible.

Q: The results are yet to be out. What if you are declared the winner of the election

Atiku: There is no way I can be declared the winner now, when no election took place. How can anybody be declared a winner, whether myself or any other person when no election took place? Of course the ruling party will declare itself the winner. We have always expected that. And so that is going to be.

Q: What is the way out?

Atiku: Of course, we will head to the court. We have faith in the judiciary.

Meanwhile, the ANPP presidential candidate and former Head of state, Major-General Muhammadu Buhari (rtd) is expected to leave his Daura village in Katsina state today for Abuja where he had scheduled to meet with the ANPP chieftains to deliberate on their next line of action.

Buhari told newsmen in Daura on Saturday shortly after voting that he had directed his supporters across the country to collate what they have as he was proceeding straight to the election tribunal.

He said the conduct of the Presidential and National Assembly poll like that of the previous week was disappointing and very unacceptable.

According to him he cannot find himself accepting and congratulating any winner from such election marred by glaring irregularities.

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