



### Press Release

## AFRICAN UNION ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION OBSERVES OPENING, CLOSING OF POLLS AND COUNTING OF VOTES IN NIGERIAN ELECTIONS CALLS FOR CALM AND PEACEFUL ATMOSPHERE

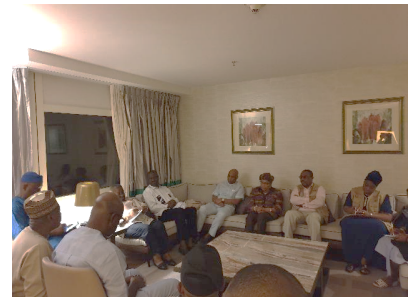


**Abuja, Nigeria 23 February 2019-** The Head of the African Union Election Observation Mission (AUEOM) to the 2019 General Elections in Nigeria, H.E Hailemariam Desalegn Boshe, has reiterated his call for the maintenance of a calm and peaceful atmosphere during the voting process and also after the announcement of the results. The former Ethiopian Prime Minister was speaking as he witnessed the start of the voting at Wuse Zone 3 Junior Secondary School in Abuja today. He was accompanied by the African Union (AU) Commissioner

for Political Affairs H.E Minata Samate Cessouma and other members of the AUEOM secretariat. Over 84 million Nigerians were registered to vote at 119 973 polling units. Voting was scheduled to start at 08:00 and conclude at 14:00 nationwide, in elections that were postponed from the 16<sup>th</sup> of this month.

“As the AUEOM, working closely with ECOWAS as the pillar of the AU in West Africa, we continue to encourage peaceful, transparent and credible elections. Since early morning, we have been going around to witness the opening of the polls and to observe the early hours at the voting centers”, Mr. Desalegn told media at one of the stops in Abuja’s Area 10. He called on all stakeholders to refrain from any action that may incite violence and encouraged all parties to use the legal instruments at their disposal to address any grievances they may have after the elections.

In the afternoon, the Head of Mission led the team to witness the close of voting and the start of the vote counting. The AUEOM has observers distributed in the different geopolitical zones of the country; they too spent the day observing the voting and the counting of ballots. Their reports will contribute to the African Union’s preliminary report on the elections, to be released at a press conference on Monday, 25<sup>th</sup> February at Hilton Transcorp at 10:00am.



In the meantime, Mr Desalegn, accompanied by the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, has, over the past few weeks, met with various electoral stakeholders, in the lead up to the Nigerian

elections. These include the political parties, the group of ambassadors and the Pan African parliament, the United Nations, the Independent Nigerian Electoral Commission (INEC), heads of other international election observation missions, the ECOWAS Network of Election Commissions (ECONEC), the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Development in Africa (EISA), the National Democratic Institute and the Independent Republican Institute (NDI/IRI), the European Union, the Commonwealth group, and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), of which Nigeria is a member, and the media.



Following the postponement of the elections on 16<sup>th</sup> February, Mr Desalegn continued to meet with stakeholders with a view to identifying any challenges and assisting in resolving them. That same day, he led the AUEOM delegation to a press conference held by the INEC on the postponement of the elections. The AUEOM later joined other international election observation missions in issuing a joint statement, which, while noting disappointment with the postponement of the elections to 23<sup>rd</sup> February, also called on all Nigerians to remain calm and supportive of the electoral process, and further urged the INEC to finalise all preparations within the extra one week. It expressed solidarity with the people of Nigeria in their desire for credible and peaceful elections. The statement also called on INEC to provide regular updates and information to the public. When the first such briefing was held on the 17<sup>th</sup> February, the AUEOM attended, with their Head of Mission.

On 22 February, the Head of the AUEOM co-chaired a pre-election meeting of the heads of election observation missions with the ECOWAS Head of Mission, former Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, which discussed the state of INEC's preparedness for the rescheduled elections. That meeting resulted in a statement by ECOWAS, supported by other mission heads, calling for peaceful elections, among other things.

The results of the elections are expected to start trickling in from Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> February. On the 25<sup>th</sup>, the AUEOM will present its preliminary findings at a press conference to be held at the Hilton Transcorp Hotel at 10am. Media personnel are invited to attend.

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