

ASUU POSITION ON THE 2011 GENERAL ELECTIONS

Written by Dr M K Aliyu

Tuesday, 07 June 2011 14:00 -

One assessment of the elections was that they were remarkable improvement over the past elections in Nigeria, even though there were flaws which would need to be addressed and corrected. A second assessment is that the 2011 elections demonstrated that the ruling politicians showed no genuine commitment to free and fair elections. The most serious obstacle to free and fair election in Nigeria is the political culture of rigging entrenched by politicians in Nigeria since 1960. The 2011 elections did not break that culture. This rigging culture was fuelled, partly, by the politics of ethnicity, regionalism (zoning), religion, and the desperation of politicians to occupy or retain elective offices for the purpose of accumulation of wealth. The rigging culture will continue to feed on the poverty, illiteracy and unemployment of a large section of the populace.

It is condemnable that the ruling class politicians have not given up their culture of conducting politics as warfare. Thus cases of rigging, ballot box snatching, political assassination, violence, underage voting, and intimidation of voters were observed. New forms of dangerous electoral behaviour also emerged. For example, some political parties resorted to buying the cards of voters to prevent them from casting their votes for their opponents. The condemnable role of money in shaping electoral outcomes was observed in many places. The detonation of bombs against civilian targets reminiscent of suicide bombings emerged as a new feature of electoral politics in Nigeria. In some parts of the country, widespread violence broke out following the announcement of election results. This violence claimed the lives of ten NYSC members in Bauchi State and several civilians in Kaduna and Kano States. The allegations that some INEC Resident Electoral Commissioners (RECs) were involved in election rigging through collaboration with political parties to trade ballot papers should be taken seriously. So should the charge that many ad hoc electoral officers were also compromised. A large number of voters sold their cards because of poverty. Political parties recruited and were allowed to use their own ad hoc staff in many areas under the guise of election observers.

ASUU condemns the killing of the Youth Corpers in the aftermath of the elections. ASUU extends its condolence to the Nigerian people and families of the slain Corpers who, only a year earlier, were our students. The country and their families have suffered irreparable loss because in the African world, life has meaning and value that can never be compensated, in the case of loss, by money. ASUU therefore calls on government that it should take full responsibility for the education of two members of the family of each late Youth Corper up to tertiary level. ASUU also calls on the Federal Government to name streets and buildings after each of the Youth Corpers killed in Bauchi state. It should also commission the building of a monument that will demonstrate that the spirit of national unity, patriotism and national service that the Corp members represent shall never die.

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ASUU wishes to observe that elections will actually become truly free, fair, credible and ACCEPTABLE only when they produce and lead to meaningful change in direction for our country. The election has only led to the change in the baton of power from one member of the same relay team to another. The same crop of politicians of questionable patriotism, changing parties without principles, credible ideology or meaningful programs will dominate the political life of a people who are in dire need of liberating change. These politicians will not bring about any improvements to the life of our people.

This means that major reforms are required in the electoral politics of Nigeria. Some of the needed reforms are available in the Justice Uwais led Electoral Reforms' Committee. Other elements of the reform must include circumscribing the role of money in the electoral process, the setting up of an Electoral Offences Tribunal with powers similar to those of EFCC, and most importantly making politics a vocation of service as opposed to one that provides opportunity to steal public funds and amass stupendous wealth. We demand for a total review of the reward system of all elected public office holders in Nigeria, to be in consonance with the remuneration in the federal civil service. We demand that the problems of poverty and unemployment must be urgently tackled by government through programmes that actually make a difference in lives.

We want to warn that if these demands are not heeded, Nigeria will witness in no distant future violent uprisings that are avoidable. Nigerians must not be taken for eternal fools who will bear any and every indignity and humiliation heaped upon them by members of Nigeria's ruling political class.

Ultimately the labour movement must go back to the drawing board to re-invent the party of the popular forces in Nigeria. ASUU NEC calls upon the labour movement and all its allies to intervene again and ensure the emergence of a genuine party of workers and other under-privileged classes in Nigeria. That is the answer to the unjust society that our rulers have created and are bent on perpetuating.