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Ms. Moudou: Some people have been critical of these elections, claiming they were not transparent. Do you think that the elections were free and fair?

Dr. Fomunyoh: First of all, let me say that I feel really honored and privileged as an African to have this opportunity to contribute to the democratization process in the continent. I can't believe it, but it has been more than a decade since some of us have been engaged in this effort working with African partners, democrats across the continent, trying to have countries make the transition from one party rule or military rule to functioning democracies.

To answer your question, normally we try to avoid using the words "free and fair" because that simplifies what can be a complex process. An election is an ongoing process; it has many components, some of which may work and others that may not work. What we saw in these Nigerian elections were well-conducted elections in a number of states and parts of the country. But we also saw cases of irregularities and shortcomings in specific constituencies, which would cast some doubts as to the exact outcome, especially for the legislative elections and the gubernatorial races.

Some opposition leaders have called on the international community not to recognize these elections, and suggest a cancellation of the presidential elections. What is your opinion?

Dr. Chris Fomunyoh on Monitoring the Recent Nigerian Elections

By Linord Moudou

I think it is their right to manifest their disapproval of the election results as currently announced by the election commission. The good thing that we are seeing this time around in Nigeria, a country that has been known in the past to have the intervention of the military in the political process, is that the opposition leaders who lost the elections are putting their petitions through the complaint mechanism which is provided in the electoral code of Nigeria; I think that's right. That code also provides for re-run of elections in constituencies where the irregularities have been proven.

So, I think as far as handling their grievances through the normal process, the legal process, this can only contribute to strengthening the democratization process in Nigeria.

According to you, should people accept these elections as final?

Well, we are talking about three sets of elections. In the Presidential elections for example, the incumbent President Obasanjo is said to have won with 62 percent of the votes. The vote totals may be such that even if elections were re-run in some specific constituencies, it wouldn't impact the outcome.

On the other end, for the gubernatorial and legislative elections, some shortcomings in certain constituencies could have impacted who was elected into the National Assembly, the Senate or the State House. For those specific cases there ought to be a thorough investigation to make sure that whoever is declared the winner is the person who actually garnered the majority of votes in that specific constituency.

Did NDI make some recommendations regarding these issues?

We did make some recommendations encouraging the Independent National Electoral Commission in Nigeria (INEC), to investigate claims that are being made by political parties. We also encouraged these parties to provide INEC and the election tribunals with the appropriate documentation to back up their case, and we called on these authorities to make the appropriate decision with the sense of justice and fairness, in order to enhance for Nigerian people the credibility of the electoral process.

We must not lose sight of the fact that ultimately it is going to be the people of Nigeria who will have to make the final judgment to determine whether this was a credible process or not. My sense is that most of the

Nigerians are happy to see that their country has gone through one democratically elected government that has served its full term, and now, the country is on the verge of providing another mandate to people who have been elected into office through the democratic process.

You've worked throughout Africa monitoring elections in many countries; what aspect of election monitoring presents the greatest challenge on the continent?

I think the greatest challenge for international observers is the ability to grasp all of the intricacies involved in conducting elections in transition environments. It is whether these observers, no matter how long they stay in the host country, can master all the tricks so to speak, that are used to rig elections.

I am very pleased to say that in the last decade, we've seen a lot of efforts being made to mitigate that shortcoming in election monitoring. We've seen increasing numbers of people in host countries, such as civic

activists and university students, come together to organize as domestic observers. This pattern is growing; one can now see thousands of nationals in African countries organize themselves to monitor elections. We've seen that where it happens, the partnership that emerges between the domestic observers and the international observers can really harness and enhance the advantages that both groups bring to the process.

In Nigeria for example, there were forty eight thousand Nigerians who were accredited by the Independent Election Commission to serve as domestic monitors. The work that we did as international observers was in partnership with these domestic groups and really enhanced credibility in the monitoring efforts.

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