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IRIAD – The Electoral Hub Commemorates Democracy Day

As we celebrate Democracy Day, let us remember that democracy's strength lies in the collective will and action of the people. It requires constant vigilance, courage, and commitment from all Nigerians. Together, we can overcome the challenges before us and build a democracy that delivers justice, equity, and prosperity for all.

On Democracy Day, Nigeria faces the urgent need to confront persistent and deep-rooted challenges that continue to undermine the nation's democratic development. The Initiative for Research, Innovation and Advocacy in Development (IRIAD) and The Electoral Hub emphasize that, rather than celebrating progress, it is imperative to recognize the serious obstacles threatening the integrity and future of democracy in the country.

Despite making up nearly half of Nigeria's population, women remain severely underrepresented in political leadership. Women hold less than 10% of seats in the National Assembly, with only about 3.6% in the Senate and 4.17% in the House of Representatives. In state Houses of Assembly, women constitute just 4.83% of legislators. This underrepresentation stems from systemic barriers such as cultural biases, economic constraints, political violence, and limited support within male-dominated political parties. The few women who attain political office often face marginalization and limited influence in decision-making, compounded by harassment and intimidation that discourage sustained political engagement. Although Nigeria has committed to international frameworks like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA), and national affirmative action policies, implementation remains weak, and women's political participation lags behind global averages. Addressing these issues is critical to building a more representative and accountable democracy.

Nonetheless, the democratic journey has not been without setbacks. Corruption remains a significant obstacle, undermining public trust and diverting resources from vital sectors such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure. Security challenges, ranging from terrorism and banditry to communal conflicts, kidnapping, and oil bunkering, continue to threaten citizens' safety and the government's capacity to govern effectively. Political exclusion and electoral malpractices, including vote-buying and violence, persist and erode the credibility of our elections. Furthermore, the shrinking civic space, characterized by restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly, and the press, poses a grave threat to democratic freedoms.

In recent times, certain government actions have raised serious concerns about the direction of Nigeria's democracy. The federal government's declaration of a state of emergency in Rivers State and the suspension of the elected governor without adherence to constitutional procedures represent a dangerous overreach of executive authority. Such actions undermine the separation of powers and the principle of federalism, setting a troubling precedent for governance by decree rather than democratic consensus.

These developments threaten to reverse the hard-won gains of Nigerian democracy and undermine citizens' trust in democratic institutions. Democracy is more than periodic elections;

it is about respect for human rights, adherence to the rule of law, protection of civil liberties, and the delivery of tangible benefits to the people.

Building on these challenges and concerns, the ongoing constitutional reforms present a crucial opportunity for the government to address the needs of all Nigerians, particularly in advancing gender equity and broader inclusivity. To safeguard and strengthen our democracy, these reforms must enshrine protections for civil liberties, promote equitable political participation, and ensure robust accountability. Achieving this requires a transparent, participatory process that genuinely responds to the voices of marginalized groups, especially women and youth, thereby reinforcing the foundations of a more representative and resilient democratic system.

Call to Action

On this Democracy Day, IRIAD - The Electoral Hub calls upon all stakeholders to renew their commitment to democratic principles and take concrete steps to strengthen Nigeria's democracy:

- **Government:** We urge the federal and state governments to respect constitutional governance by adhering strictly to due process and the rule of law. The government must intensify efforts to combat corruption through transparent and accountable institutions, protect civic space by guaranteeing freedoms of expression, assembly, and the press, and prioritize security reforms that safeguard citizens' rights and lives. It is imperative that the ongoing constitutional reforms fully incorporate the needs of the people, especially by promoting gender equity and inclusivity in political participation.
- **Political Parties and Leaders:** Political actors must promote internal democracy within their ranks, ensuring transparent and inclusive candidate selection processes. They should desist from all forms of electoral malpractice and violence and engage citizens sincerely to address their needs and aspirations. Special emphasis should be placed on removing barriers to women's participation and leadership in politics.
- **Civil Society and Media:** These actors must continue to serve as watchdogs and advocates for democratic reforms. It is crucial to defend civic freedoms vigorously, support victims of political repression, and mobilize citizens, especially youth and marginalized groups, to participate actively in democratic processes. Amplifying the voices of women and ensuring their concerns are integrated into governance discussions is essential.
- **Citizens:** Every Nigerian has a vital role to play by exercising their voting rights responsibly, holding elected officials accountable, and promoting peace and tolerance in their communities. Active and informed participation is the foundation of a thriving democracy. Citizens should also advocate for constitutional reforms that reflect their needs and protect their rights.

As we celebrate Democracy Day, let us remember that democracy's strength lies in the collective will and action of the people. It requires constant vigilance, courage, and commitment from all Nigerians. Together, we can overcome the challenges before us and build a democracy that delivers justice, equity, and prosperity for all.

*#DemocracyDay2025 #NigeriaDemocracy #ProtectOurDemocracy #DemocracyInAction
#DemocracyForAll*

Signed

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ABOUT IRIAD AND THE ELECTORAL HUB

The **Initiative for Research, Innovation, and Advocacy in Development** (IRIAD) is an interdisciplinary knowledge and advocacy hub committed and focused on developing a critical understanding of governance processes and regimes from research, documentation, policy engagements, public education, and impact advocacy.

The Electoral Hub is an interdisciplinary knowledge, policy and advocacy hub committed to promoting electoral knowledge, integrity, and accountability in Nigeria. Our aim is to strengthen electoral governance and accountability in Nigeria through the provision of data, critical and contextualized analysis, and solutions to improve the credibility and integrity of the electoral process.

Knowledge| Innovation | Inclusion|
#Advocacy #Results #Impact
...promoting electoral knowledge, accountability, and integrity