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## **Nigerian Election Major Step Forward**

Preliminary Statement of the International Republican Institute's Delegation

**Abuja, Nigeria** – The International Republican Institute (IRI) found that the April 16, 2011 presidential election was a major step forward in advancing Nigeria's democracy. Under the capable leadership of Attahiru Jega, chairman of the Independent National Election Commission (INEC), the election overall was transparent and orderly, allowing Nigerians the opportunity to exercise their right to vote. Chairman Jega and his team have made great strides in improving the quality of Nigerian elections and deserve credit for what has been achieved in the short eight months since they were appointed.

At more than 340 polling stations where IRI observed, delegates were particularly impressed by the Nigerian people's desire for democracy coupled with their determination to vote. Voters came early, calmly stood in line for hours to be accredited and then vote and in many cases remained in place to observe the count. The National Youth Service Corps members, who administered the election, are to be especially commended for their dedication and hard work.

Also, worthy of note was the fact that between the April 9 national assembly elections and the presidential election, INEC addressed a number of deficiencies in the election process.

Many of Nigeria's political parties have been active participants in the electoral process, signing the Party Code of Conduct and demonstrating their willingness to accept results of the April 9 national assembly elections. IRI hopes the parties will continue to accept election results and encourages them to be a positive part of the process.

Civil society was also an active participant in the electoral process and played a significant role by conducting voter education campaigns and serving as domestic observers during the national assembly and presidential elections. Strengthening the role of civil society organizations and ensuring they have the resources to conduct voter education will improve future Nigerian elections.

IRI delegates also noted the role women played in the national assembly and presidential elections. Women served as poll workers, provided security and voted in large numbers in

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the urban centers. However, the extent to which women are fully participating in the political process needs to be addressed.

IRI's delegation recognizes that all elections are a process of pre-election environment and pre-election administration, Election Day voting, vote counting, post-election adjudication and acceptance of legitimate results. Even though IRI's delegation is not yet able to assess the acceptance of the results, the overall conclusion is that in at least four areas this election was different from the previous three national elections – particularly from the election in 2007 where IRI observed and reported serious electoral fraud and disenfranchisement of the voters. The areas where IRI observed the most improvements are:

- The overall integrity of the electoral process;
- The professionalism and independence of INEC, specifically the appointment of Chairman Jega and Nigerians' confidence in his leadership and ability to oversee open and transparent elections;
- A more proper role of security forces; and
- A reduction in election-related violence.

As Nigeria enters the final stage of the electoral process for the presidential election and prepares for the gubernatorial, state assembly and local government elections, IRI's delegation encourages the political parties and election and government officials at all levels to respect the will of voters by conducting the vote tabulation in a transparent and honest manner. The delegation further encourages all candidates and their followers to accept legitimate results and file legitimate complaints with the proper authorities.

In meetings with IRI and other international election observation delegations, Chairman Jega has said that Nigerians must not rest on their laurels and that they must continue to build on the high election standards set on April 16. In this context, IRI will issue a comprehensive report in the future which will include recommendations on how Nigeria can continue to strengthen its election institutions and processes. Among the issues to be covered in those recommendations will be: 1) revisiting recommendations of the Electoral Reform Committee which were not adopted by the National Assembly; 2) improving the voter list to ensure people are properly registered; 3) strengthening civic education so all Nigerians fully understand the nature of the election process and their role; 4) ensuring that the political parties evolve into constructive actors in the process, respecting democratic values in their internal behavior and commitment to transparent elections; 5) addressing the problem of underage voting; and 6) ensuring polling stations have a manageable number of registered voters.

While violence has been relatively low during these elections, the IRI delegation extends its sympathy for those people and their families who have died or been injured during the process.

Representatives from Bangladesh, Canada, Estonia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Mexico, Norway, Sierra Leone, Slovenia and the United States observed accreditation, voting and ballot counting in Abuja, Adamawa, Akwa Ibom, Cross Rivers, Ebonyi, Enugu, Kaduna, Kano, Kogi, Lagos, Nasarawa and Ogun.

IRI's delegation was led by former Slovenian Prime Minister and current Member of Parliament Janez Janša and Constance Berry Newman, member of IRI's Board of Directors,

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former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs and former U.S. Agency for International Development Assistant Administrator for Africa.

Other IRI delegates were:

- Nadia Diuk, Vice President, Programs – Africa, Central Europe and Eurasia, Latin America and Caribbean at the National Endowment for Democracy;
- Valerie Dowling, Political Director for the National Federation of Republican Women;
- Rich Galen, political strategist and commentator;
- Deborah Grey, former member of the Canadian Parliament and first-ever female leader of the official opposition;
- Arturo Sanchez Gutierrez, advisor to the Federal Electoral Institute in Mexico;
- Jake Hale, founder of CS Advisors, LLC;
- Maureen Harrington, former Vice President for Policy and International Relations at the Millennium Challenge Corporation;
- Nazmul Ahsan Kalimullah, Chairman of the National Election Observation Council (JANIPOP) in Bangladesh;
- Darren Kew, Associate Professor of Conflict Resolution and the Executive Director of the Center for Peace, Democracy and Development at the University of Massachusetts at Boston McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies;
- Ann Liebschutz, Executive Director of the U.S. – Israel Science and Technology Foundation;
- Beate Bergsholm Lindgard, Regional Campaign Manager and Head of Office of the Conservative Party in Norway;
- Robert B. Lloyd, Associate Professor of International Relations at Pepperdine University;
- Djingarey Maiga, Executive Director of *Femmes et Droits Humains* in Mali;
- Peter Manu, Vice Chairman of the International Democratic Union and National Chairman of the New Patriotic Party in Ghana;
- Ray McNally, President and Creative Director at McNally Temple Associates, Inc.;
- Victoria Middleton, Chief of Staff to U.S. Congressman Duncan D. Hunter (CA);
- John Morlu, Auditor General of the General Auditing Commission in Liberia;
- Maimuna Abdalla Mwidau, Chairperson of the League of Muslim Women of Kenya;
- Mart Nutt, member of the Estonian Parliament;
- J. Peter Pham, Director of the Michael S. Ansari Africa Center at the Atlantic Council;
- Christiana Thorpe, Chief of the Sierra Leone National Electoral Commission; and
- Christopher Tuttle, Director of the Washington Program at the Council on Foreign Relations.

IRI staff also served as observers and assisted in the mission. They were led by Judy Van Rest, Executive Vice President; Dan Fisk, Vice President for Policy and Strategic Planning; Paul Fagan, Regional Director of IRI's Africa division based in Washington, DC; and Mourtada Deme, Country Director of IRI's Nigeria program based in Abuja.

Upon arrival in Nigeria, delegates were briefed by representatives from the U.S. Embassy, INEC, international and Nigerian nongovernmental organizations and political parties. They

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were also briefed on Nigerian election law and the rights and responsibilities of international observers.

IRI also fielded a pre-election assessment mission earlier this year, which was led by His Excellency John Kufuor, former President of Ghana, and deployed 12 long-term observers to Nigeria's six geo-political regions. IRI's long-term observers have been in Nigeria since March monitoring the campaigns and preparations for the national assembly elections, the presidential election and the gubernatorial, state assembly and local government elections. They also participated in observing the April 16 presidential election.

IRI has monitored more than 135 elections in more than 40 countries, including Nigeria's 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections.

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