

# **A citizen call for urgent legislative action to protect electoral integrity and address shrinking civic space**

December 16, 2019

Senator Godiya Akwashiki  
The Senate  
National Assembly  
Abuja

Dear Senator Akwashiki,

## **A call for urgent legislative action to protect electoral integrity and address shrinking civic space**

Since the inauguration of the 9th National Assembly, we, the undersigned civil society organizations, note a commitment on the part of legislators to use the instrumentality of legislative governance to address the myriad of challenges threatening Nigeria's national growth and development, such as insecurity, poor economic growth, poverty, weak institutions, and corruption. This commitment is exemplified in the issues articulated in the legislative agendas of both chambers of the National Assembly, and by recent legislative actions on issues of national importance. The cordial relationship between the 9th National Assembly and the executive presents a unique opportunity to leave a lasting legacy of passing high impact legislations that reflects the will of the Nigerian people, expands the democratic space, and fosters national cohesion.

As representatives of the people, we wish to express our deep concern with the following issues that could potentially imperil our two decades of democracy, if not addressed through legislative actions:

### **1. Flawed elections and electoral violence**

While we appreciate the gains thus far in reforming the nation's electoral process, citizen observation efforts during the recent elections in Kogi and Bayelsa States documented a decline in the quality and integrity of elections due to the high level of electoral manipulation, a deepening culture of impunity, and violence resulting in loss of innocent lives. Further legislative action is required to improve the nation's electoral system and process to build citizens' confidence and trust in the process. We fear that if urgent steps are not taken to fix identified areas in need of reform, we risk the prospect of reversing the gains of twenty years of democratic practice in the country.

### **2. Shrinking space for civic engagement**

The National Assembly is currently considering several pieces of legislation that threaten constitutionally guaranteed rights of the people, including freedom of expression, and peaceful assembly and association. This has created an atmosphere of fear and

apprehension, thereby undermining the capacity of citizens to effectively engage in the democratic and governance process. Bills like the Protection from Internet Falsehood and Manipulation Bill ('Social Media Bill'), Independent National Commission for the Prohibition of Hate Speeches Bill ('Hate Speech Bill'), and NGO Regulation Bill, each containing provisions that undermine citizens' constitutional rights, as noted earlier, and taints our democratic credentials.

### **3. Assault on press freedom and civic advocacy**

The deluge of illegal arrests of journalists and civic activists, as well as the unlawful and coordinated attacks and assault against journalists and media organizations by state institutions undermines the media as vanguards of transparency and accountability.

As a legislator in the 9th Assembly, history beckons on you to salvage our democracy through bills, motions, and legislative advocacy to:

1. Intensify pressure on the leadership of the National Assembly and your esteemed colleagues in the Assembly to accelerate the processes of further amendments to the electoral legal framework to protect the integrity of elections, strengthen electoral institutions, and safeguard citizens' participation in the electoral process.
2. Expand the civic and democratic space by upholding constitutional rights and halting further consideration of legislation like the NGO, Social Media, and Hate Speech Bills that restrict essential freedoms guaranteed to all Nigerians under the constitution.
3. Increase protection of journalists and media organizations, as well as secure the release of journalists and civic activists who are currently detained, unlawfully, by various security agencies.

As civil society groups committed to the Nigerian project, be assured of our solidarity and support as we work together to protect our democracy for our common good.

Signed:

### **Organizations**

1. Say No Campaign Nigeria
2. YIAGA AFRICA
3. Peering Advocacy and Advancement Centre in Africa
4. Partners for Electoral Reforms
5. Transition Monitoring Group, Women Advocates Research and Documentation Center
6. Dorothy Njemanze Foundation
7. Haly Hope Foundation
8. FEMBUD
9. Lawyers Alert
10. Premium Times Centre for Investigative Journalism
11. Education as a Vaccine

12. TechHer
13. Raising New Voices Initiative
14. To Build A Nation
15. Dinidari Foundation
16. Abuja Discourse
17. Stand to End Rape Initiative
18. Girl Child Africa
19. Sterling Centre for Law & Development
20. JENNON-PIUS & Co
21. Nigeria sex works Association (NSWA)
22. Centre for Impact Advocacy (CiA)
23. Rule of Law Development Foundation
24. Adopt A Goal For Development Initiative
25. Concerned Nigerians
26. Free Nigeria Movement
27. Global Rights
28. Positive Youth Transformation Initiative
29. Centre for Human Advocacy Networking Governance and Empowerment (CHANGE)
30. Sulhu Development Initiative
- 31. Me Africa Advocacy Group (MAAG)**
32. New Century Initiative
33. Golden Star Development Initiative
34. The Special Breeds Development Initiative
35. YoungCare Initiative for Development.
36. DIG Foundation
37. Brain Builders International
38. Center for Peace Advocacy and Sustainable Development Africa (CepasdAfrica)
39. Moral-Worth Foundation
40. Society for Arewa Development
41. Project 313
42. Side Pocket Youth Initiative (SPYI)
43. Rural Integrated Development Initiative
44. American Space-Bauchi
45. Connected Advocacy for Empowerment and Development Initiative
46. Youth Entrepreneurship Support Hub (YesHub)

### **Individuals**

1. Dorothy Njemanze
2. Priye Diri
3. Apolmida Haruna Tsammani
4. Nana Nwachukwu
5. Bukky Shonibare
6. Toyin Akinniyi
7. Akubeze Okocha

8. Augusta Yaakugh
9. Ariyo-Dare ATOYE
10. Comrade Deji Adeyanju
11. Nneka Egbuna
12. Adebayo Raphael