PRESS RELEASE

Democracy Day 2021: CISLAC expresses concerns over shrinking civic space, lingering social injustice, dwindling democratic values

The Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC) felicitates with all Nigerian and government at all levels on Democracy Day 2021, marking 22 years since return of Democracy in Nigeria.

In the spirit of celebrations, we are seriously perturbed by recent unwary development threatening citizens’ fundamental rights and freedom as well as civic space at all levels.

We, without hesitation, state that true Democracy in Nigeria is threatened by recurring political efforts to shrink civic space, growing ethnic intolerance, disobedience to citizens’ human rights, lingering socio-economic injustice, poor policy response to diverse agitations, and mismatched political ideology by successive administrations.

While Nigerians were hopeful for renewed dynamism in addressing the myriad problems bedevilling the country following the return of Democracy in 1999, we are concerned that they are today compelled to endure growing socio-economic and political challenges presented by successive administrations. These include endless insecurity, pervasive corruption and mismanagement, rising poverty and unemployment, non-observance of citizens’ human rights, and total disobedience to the rule of law.

We observed that effort at citizenry levels to protest and express dissatisfaction with governance is hampered by threats that currently manifest in media harassment and intimidation, unlawful ban of a social media App, constant harassment of Human Rights and Anti-corruption Civil Society Organisations, illegal ban on protest, and arbitrary arrests. These without doubt, are basic symptoms of the lack of necessary democratic values in Nigeria.

We on this note express total disappointment at unlawful actions of some individuals or groups to undermine Democratic values, inflame mayhems and public disorder as recently demonstrated in unconstitutional restriction of fellow citizens’ rights and freedom, targeted destructions to lives and public property, and unguarded divisive utterances, primarily to aggravate ethnic tensions and communal instabilities.

We are more concerned that the democratic values which were meant to enhance socio-economic opportunities for betterment of the marginalised, promote peaceful coexistence, secure citizens’ rights and freedom, and protect the vulnerable groups are mistook by some individuals or groups to exacerbate insecurity, inflict tensions, killings, destructions and instabilities; as recently observed in some parts of the country.

We reiterate concerns over shaky credibility and integrity that dominates Nigeria’s electoral system and process. This accompanied by electoral irregularities including fraud, vote buying and rigging as well as massive deployment of hoodlums in elections, continues to impair reform, justice, transparency and accountability in electoral process, while breathing public distrust in political institutions.
We therefore call for thorough review of party politics and political ideology to pilot a people-oriented blueprint for desired good governance and true democracy in Nigeria.

We demand unconditional respect for citizens’ human rights irrespective of their socio-economic and political status at all levels including recognition of their freedom of expression as a Constitutional right and not privilege.

As efficient delivery of democratic dividend to the citizens rests largely on enabling legal environment through strict adherence to the rule of law by relevant institutions, we call for total respect for the sanity and sanctity of the rule of law to enhance democratic values such as accountability, transparency, and human rights promotion and protection.

We call on the government at all levels to uphold and allow civic space for meaningful contribution to democratic governance in Nigeria, with demonstrated commitment to the principles of responsibility and responsiveness for good governance.

We demand sincere effort by relevant authorities to address pervasive insecurity, unemployment and poverty with strong emphasis on true federalism and Local Government Autonomy to enable impactful democratic dividend and sustainable development in the grassroots.

We call for the creation of an independent and functional Electoral Offences Commission to investigate and prosecute breaches of relevant electoral provisions including vote buying and rigging.

We demand an independent and strengthened electoral institution to actualise and maintain secret balloting system and electoral voting in the entire process including registration, accreditation, vote counting, collation and announcement chain to discourage vote buying and rigging, and enhance electoral integrity and accountability.

We further demand immediate investigation and prosecution of the recent killings of innocent citizens and security personnel in various parts of the country to demonstrate social justice, reinforce peaceful co-existence and responsive governance.

We also call for the development of a new policy framework with comprehensive mutual benefit to address existing communal challenges and compensate victims of social injustice and marginalisation to foster national integrity.

We encourage the media at all levels on appropriate public enlightenment and citizens’ re-orientation to mitigate impact of reported cases of divisive utterances, hate speeches and provocation, to complement policy effort towards sustainable peaceful co-existence.

Signed:

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