

HEATING THE NATIONAL POLITY AND THE NEED FOR CAUTION
Being a press statement by
SAVANNAH CENTRE FOR DIPLOMACY, DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT

GENERAL BACKGROUND

1. The Nigerian state has entered yet another election cycle in our journey of democracy. As we approach the general elections of 2019, the country has began to see activities consistent with democratic norms yet full of aberrations that threatens democracy itself and our collective aspiration for a stable and progressive nation. If the path of development through democracy is to be followed diligently, recent events in the polity portend danger we must avert. We in Savannah Centre have therefore deemed it necessary to express the need for caution in our national polity. Key players must exercise extreme sense of decorum and patriotism during this period by avoiding incendiary comments and engaging in activities that can cause derailment of the democratic process as we move towards the 2019 general elections.

INSECURITY

2. Official comments from government spokespersons have laid the blame of insecurity at the doorstep of politicians. The resurgence of insurgency, rural banditry, farmer/herder clashes, communal clashes and resource militancy have all been traced to political power struggle. Recent decamping of National Assembly members from one party to the other and the attendant struggle over key appointments in the assembly, the decamping of some governors and members of state legislatures have all heightened tension and insecurity in the states. Perhaps it is necessary to remind Nigerians that decamping and crosscarpeting began in 1965 at the floor of Western Nigeria House of Assembly and snowballed into what is now known in history as wild Wild West. Those events finally led to a civil war from which Nigeria is yet to fully recover. It behoves of all of us leaders and the led to be cautious of what the current gale of decamping portend. And to exercise extreme restraints in counter responses.

CONDUCT OF SECURITY AGENCIES

3. In the face of these challenges, we find the acrimonious relationship among security agencies and the unconstitutional occupation of the National Assembly as totally unwarranted and dangerous to the system. It is incumbent upon security agencies to collaborate among themselves for effective service delivery mindful of the rule of law and obedience to civil authority. Security agencies should begin to shift security paradigm

from state-centric to people-oriented security. National security architecture must be reformed to embrace citizen participation. Above all, security agencies should never be deployed for regime security or personal aggrandizement.

POLITICAL PARTIES

4. Events at the political party level has shown lack of restraints and serial upheavals that impact on the larger national spheres. Conduct of party primaries, general mobilization lack of internal democracy and sense of probity have become the hallmark of political management and thus very worrisome. It is incumbent upon party leadership to uphold high standard of moral and civility in the conduct of themselves and their followership. Statements emanating from political party leadership must reflect maturity and high sense of decency rather than the use of hate and abusive language that is becoming commonplace. As we move closer to party primaries and general elections Savannah Centre urges all participants to be mindful of demeanours that would set this country on the path of firestorm.

NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS

5. We find appalling and unethical for national stakeholders who are past leaders of this nation making incendiary comments on national issues. We believe that while each and every citizen in his personal capacity has freedom of speech, their comments are more weighty and far reaching in impact and ramifications for the nation. They must therefore endeavour even under provocation to be mindful of national cohesion and interest. We enjoin leaders at national, regional and community levels to be on guard and to gather their loins for the challenges ahead. Collectively, we must not allow politicians to set our country ablaze.

COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERISM

6. The building block for nation building is the community. We must begin to avert our minds to the need to build a strong and vibrant community level leadership. We call on local organizations like descendant unions, traditional rulers, local non governmental organizations to build capacity for community vibrancy in decision-making process that affect their lives. Communities must commit to free and fair elections and ensure that right caliber of people represent their communities.

THE MEDIA

7. The role of the media in a democratic regime is very crucial. As purveyors of news and information to the general public, what they choose to convey and the language adopted can make or mire. We draw attention once more, as Savannah Centre has done in recent past, on hate speech. We call on the National Broadcasting Commission and all other regulatory bodies to be up and doing in ensuring that no media outfit crosses the line. We reintegrate once more that we must rein in abuse of social media. Social media must be regulated to ensure hate speech and war of words are tempered.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY LEADERSHIP

8. National Assembly proceedings in the last 3 years have often brought the nation on edge. While Savannah Centre admits the need for vibrancy in their legislative functions and the importance of checks and balances between the legislature and the executive, caution must be exercised to ensure that the synergy required for great achievement is not jeopardized.

THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH

9. Its needs no searchlight to see the obvious disconnect between the Executive branch of government and the legislature. Delays in the passage of budget bills, acrimonies attending the contents of the bill and the politics of supplementary budgets leaves the nation in quandary. We urge the Presidency to assert robust leadership to bring this frequent impasse to a close.

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

10. Savannah Centre appreciates the role of the international community in ensuring that our democratic process is not mired by violence and collapse. The stake of international community on our democratic project is recognized. However it is also worrisome that the international community too often and too quickly jump into the fray on domestic matters. The like we have seen in the National Assembly is totally unacceptable and uncalled for. We urge the international community particularly diplomats and national leaders to exercise restraints on their comments and political alignments.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

11. The involvement of civil society and non governmental organizations in ensuring good governance and democratic conduct make them partners in project Nigeria. As partners in the democratic process, we call on them to be on their toes to ensure sanity prevails in the democratic process. Their diligence in exposing dangers and the sounding of early warnings shall go a long way in putting the country on the right path of democracy. In similar vein, they must exercise restraints about over sensationalism and be mindful of the sensibilities and the fabrics that join the the nation together.

CONCLUSION

12. Savannah Centre is committed to ensuring free and fair elections in the country and is committed to doing what ever it can to prevent derailment of the process. The nation should recall efforts of the Council of the Wise, an initiative of this centre which contributed to the smooth transition of government in 2015 and its programme of hate speech. As a think tank centre, we shall continue to work towards greater levels of diplomatic engagements, better democratic polity that can bring peace and development to our country.