



SCDDD
SAVANNAH CENTRE
FOR DIPLOMACY, DEMOCRACY & DEVELOPMENT

SAVANNAH CENTRE

FOR DIPLOMACY, DEMOCRACY & DEVELOPMENT



REPORT OF THE SAVANNAH CENTRE'S

COUNCIL OF THE WISE

ON NIGERIA AND THE CHALLENGES OF NATIONAL
UNITY BEYOND THE 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS

Supported By:

MacArthur
Foundation

PLAC
PRACTICE FOR LEADERSHIP AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

© Savannah Centre for Diplomacy, Democracy & Development, 2023

COUNCIL OF THE WISE



ISBN:

All rights reserved

No part of the publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without prior permission of SCDDD.

Savannah Centre for Diplomacy, Democracy and Development (SCDDD)

Plot 239 P.O.W. Mafemi Crescent, behind Chida Event Centre
beside Daily Trust, District 900108 - Abuja.
+234 8063862352: +234 8065479817

info@savannahcentrenig.org: www.savannahcentre.com

Twitter.com/savannah_Centre: [facebook.com/savannahcentreng](https://www.facebook.com/savannahcentreng)



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Acknowledgements
3	Executive Summary
4	Council of the Wise Composition
6	Council of the Wise as an Intervention Model to Prevent Election Violence and Other Electoral Malpractices and Deepen Democracy in Nigeria
9	Inauguration of the Council of the Wise
14	Activities of the Council
15	The Council's Advocacy Engagement with the All Progressive Congress (APC)
8	The Council's Advocacy Engagement with the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP)
9	The Council's Advocacy Engagement with the Inter-Party Advisory Council (IPAC)
10	The Council's Pre-Election Campaign Media Parley
11	The Council's Strategic Advocacy Consultation with President Muhammadu Buhari, GCFR
12	The Council's Advocacy Engagement with the Social Democratic Party (SDP) Presidential Candidate
13	The Council's Advocacy Engagement with the Deji of Akure and Other Stakeholders in Akure, Ondo State
14	The Council's Advocacy Engagement with the Sultan of Sokoto
15	The Council's Advocacy Engagement with Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, GCFR
16	The Council of the Wise Pre-Election Press Conference
17	Some Speeches of Council of the Wise



Acknowledgements

It is with great delight that the Savannah Centre for Diplomacy, Democracy and Development appreciates the undiluted support and contribution of the MacArthur Foundation towards the smooth implementation of the Leadership Effectiveness and Accountability Dialogue (LEAD) project. Special appreciation goes to Dr. Kole Shettima, MacArthur's Country Director in Nigeria, who continued to believe in the capacity of Savannah Centre on advocacy engagements. The entire staff of the Country Director's office has been very cooperative and supportive. The Centre is indebted to them.

The Centre also recognizes with deep appreciation the personal sacrifices made by our esteemed and patriotic Council members, led by Her Lordship Justice Zainab A. Bulkachwa, former President Court of Appeal, who, despite her health challenges, provided the desired leadership and commitment that led to the success of the Council. We are deeply grateful and pray to God Almighty to give her good health and long life. Undoubtedly, each Council members were carefully selected in recognition of the unique qualities and benefit his or her experience and expertise would impact on the activities of the Council. Indeed, they have all worked to the Centre's expectations and provided excellent contributions to the Council's activities throughout, thereby engendering sustained advocacy for peace before, during and after the 2023 general elections. It is sad to note that in the course of the work of the Council, it lost a very revered and outstanding figure in the person of late Malam Abidu Yazid, who died in September 2022, three months after the inauguration of the Council and performing three of its numerous engagements. Malam Abidu Yazid served as the chairman of the Board of Directors of the Centre and as the vice chairman of the Council of the Centre. He was indeed very resourceful and a fountain of knowledge with wealth of experience in various field of endeavors like a colossus. He was reputed to be a person that always impacted knowledge and experience at every encounter. May the Almighty Allah reward him with Aljannah Firdaus and afford the family the fortitude to bear the great loss.

Engineer Ebele Okeke demonstrated her leadership capabilities and perspective talents in engaging most of the stakeholders which earned the Council great respect and credibility. She was always able to sway the political class into realising the necessity of Nigeria remaining united by avoiding inflammatory and inciteful statements and peddling of rumors. Amb. Brownson Dede, who stepped in as the acting chairman of the Centre after the demise of Malam Abidu Yazid, once again brought his wealth of experiences in diplomacy and world affairs to bear on the workings of the Council. He shared his rich experiences in elections in many countries, enunciating some workable aspect that could be adopted by Nigeria to ensure free, fair and credible elections.

The Centre also appreciates the contributions of Prof. Remi Sonaiya; Oba (Dr.) Omoniyi Adedokun Abolarin, the Orangun of Oke-Ila Orangun; Mr. Oluwole Osaze-Uzzi; Amb. Abdullahi Bage and Mr. Uchenna Simon who at one engagement or the other shared their expertise and experience with the stakeholders.

It is imperative to recognize the tireless and wonderful efforts of the staff of the Program Division of the Centre under the abled leadership of the Senior Program Manager, Sir. Bola Abimbola. They shouldered the enormous responsibilities of organizing and coordinating the meetings, engagements and travels of the Council. Judging from the success of the Council, the staff handled their assignment effectively and efficiently. There was never any complaint from the Council members or the management of the Centre. The Centre, therefore, appreciates the staff for their cooperation, dedication and commitment.

In no small measure, the LEAD project has contributed to the democratic advancement of Nigeria at multi-level, and it is our belief that in years to come, Nigeria shall continue to enjoy the gains of the project.

It is our belief that through the contribution of Savannah Centre towards a peaceful and violence-free electioneering process in Nigeria, democratic stability would deepen and ultimately lead to sustainable development and growth of the country.



Savannah Centre for Diplomacy, Democracy, and Development, Abuja, Nigeria. June, 2022.



The proceeding events and the aftermath of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria raised concerns about the state of Nigeria's unity and cohesion, which informed the opinion of some stakeholders calling on the President to compose a Government of National Unity (GNU). The argument is that such a strategy could calm down frayed nerves and create some measure of unity between winners and losers of elections.

Nigeria had in the 1970s worked persistently towards national unity by formulating strategic policies such as the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) program. Until recently, the NYSC served as a tool for national unity and integration. But like many Nigerian policies, most of the ideas of its founders have been greatly diluted. The federal character principle on its part has been politicised and poorly managed.

Undoubtedly, Nigeria is not the only multi-ethnic nation in the world, but ethnic differences have been visible in recent past. Like other nations, Nigeria needs to creatively manage its differences to make remarkable impacts on the global stage.

Clearly, the future of this country lies squarely in uniting the people. Unity will bring citizens together to create a shared vision and promote peaceful coexistence. Peace will engender greater national productivity and economic progress, and Nigeria will take its rightful place in the comity of nations which informed the fulcrum of intervention of the Leadership Effectiveness and Accountability Dialogue (LEAD) project.

COUNCIL OF THE WISE

The Council of the Wise comprises of distinguished and patriotic Nigerians drawn from the six geopolitical zones who have contributed immensely to the development of Nigeria in their respective quota. Their works are with track records, and as such, that stood them out to be among the few Nigerians who were carefully selected by the board and management of Savannah Centre to be part of the Council. It is interesting to note that, in spite of the retirement of almost all of the members, they are not tired of accepting responsibilities on matters that could contribute to national development. The Council members are as follow:



S/N	NAME	PROFILE	DESIGNATION IN THE COUNCIL	GENDER
1.	Hon. Justice Zainab Adamu Bulkachuwa, OFR, CFR.	President Court of Appeal (Retired)	Chair	Female
2.	Malam Abidu Yazid, OON (Late)	Former Board Chairman, Savannah Centre	Co-Chair	Male
3.	Amb. Sani S. Bala	Executive Director, Savannah Centre (Retired Federal Permanent Secretary)	Member/Secretary	Male
4.	Engr. Ebele Okeke OON and CFR	Engr. Okeke, retired Head of the Civil Service of Federation	Member	Female
5.	Mr. Oluwole Osaze-Uzzi	Former Director, Voter Education and Publicity (VEP), Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).	Member	Male
6.	Prof. Remi Sonaiya	Former Presidential (KOWA Party) Candidate), Educationalist and Writer	Member	Female
7.	Amb. Abdullahi Bage	Chiroman Lafiya	Member	Male
8	His Royal Majesty, Oba (Dr.) Adedokun Omoniyi Abolarin,	Aroyinkeye I, The Orangun of Okella, Okella, Osun State.	Member	Male
9.	Amb. Brownson Dede	Former Nigerian Envoy to Ethiopia, Board Chairman, Savannah Centre	Member	Male
10.	Malam Garba Ganger	Retired Director, Industrial Training Fund (ITF)	Member	Male
11	Uchenna Simon (MC Tagwaye)	Nigerian entertainer and Chief Executive Officer, Tagwaye Twin Communication	Member	Male

Background

From the 1999 general elections, Nigerians faith in democracy as a form of government that would ensure peace, stability and national unity and development of the country started to suffer serious setbacks occasioned by the way and manner the political class handled the electioneering process. To them, elections were a matter of life and death, therefore, they employed all manner of rough tactics such thuggery, killings, hate speech, rigging, vote buying, ballot box stuffing with fake ballots etc. The unfortunate Boko Haram insurgency in the North East heightened and exacerbated the already destabilizing fault lines of the country such as ethno-religious conflicts, herders-farmers clashes in the North West and North Central, pipeline vandalisation in the South South and South East. Election cycles continue to be characterized by violence and electoral malpractices which always questioned the credibility of the election after the destruction of lives and property.

The 2007 general elections produced late President Umaru Musa Yaradua as president, but he himself admitted publicly that the elections were flawed. For this reason, he took steps to ensure that future elections were better. One of which was the setting up of an Electoral Reform Committee headed by Justice Uwais. However, as the 2011 General Elections were approaching, the political atmosphere was fully charged and poised for another circle of violence. Following the elections, there were massive killings and destruction across the nation, with 1,000 people losing their lives in the mayhem experienced in the North Eastern States.

Eventually, the triggers and drivers of election-related violence continued to have firm roots in the Nigerian people so much that as the 2015 general elections were approaching, the situation became more serious, requiring more intervention.

Nigeria also has the unfortunate poor record of having weak institutions and ineffective laws largely because of the attitude of people charged with the responsibility of managing state institutions, and the menace of corruption. Certainly, the situation should not be allowed to continue, and as such, measures must be taken to salvage it in order to entrench democracy and its appealing values.

As its contribution to national efforts to salvage and entrench democracy in Nigeria and promote national unity, the Savannah Centre for Diplomacy, Democracy and Development came up with the idea of establishing an intervention body to engage as many stakeholders as possible to ensure that everyone plays their respective roles effectively and sincerely. With support from MacArthur Foundation in 2014, the Centre constituted the Council of the Wise, with members from the six geopolitical zones to assist Nigeria and Nigerians in addressing the national challenges hampering national cohesion and unity. The Centre is fully convinced that good governance is a panacea to most of the social limits and challenges, and to install a good government, the selection of good leaders must be free, fair,



transparent, inclusive and credible, devoid of all forms of electoral malpractice. All stakeholders - the political class, political parties, election managers, security agencies and the electorate must play their respective roles sincerely.

The Council played a vital role in ensuring a free, fair and violence-free election in 2015 through its numerous engagements with many stakeholders. The Council visited all the six geopolitical zones of the country, meeting with politicians, presidential aspirants, leadership of political parties, state governors, religious leaders, political influencers, traditional rulers, socio-cultural groups, youths and women groups and security agencies. These engagements greatly helped in building trust and mutual consciousness, a sense of responsibility and mutual respect among state and non-state actors in the election process.

In order for the Centre to contribute to the success of the 2023 general elections and strengthening national unity, it deemed it appropriate and desirable to reconstitute the “Council of the Wise” under the Leadership Effectiveness and Accountability Dialogue (LEAD) II project also supported by MacArthur Foundation. It was envisaged to perform the same crucial role it played before, during and after the 2015 general elections.

1. **The Leadership Effectiveness and Accountability Dialogue (LEAD) II Project** designed by Savannah Centre for Diplomacy, Democracy and Development (SCDDD), in collaboration with MacArthur Foundation, Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) and Joint National Association of Persons with Disability (JONAPWD), organised the Council of the Wise Inauguration and National Dialogue under the theme, Nigeria and the Challenges of National Unity: Beyond 2023 General Elections, on Monday 6th June 2022 at the Centenary Hall of Ibeto Hotel, No. 34, David Ejoor Crescent, Apo-Gudu District, Abuja, Nigeria.
2. **Ambassador Sani Bala (Wamban Katsina)**, the Executive Director, Savannah Centre for Diplomacy, Democracy and Development (SCDDD), in his opening remarks, he appreciated the state and non-state actors present at the event, stating that, “the aim of the programme is to expand and deepen the discussion and promotion of constructive engagement and national dialogue on, restructuring vis-à-vis strengthening national cohesion, good and accountable governance (fight against corruption) as well as inclusivity, justice, and fairness.” He also emphasised that “the dialogue offered the centre an opportunity to inaugurate eminent Nigerians into the re-constituted Savannah Centre’s Council of the Wise, who would help in leading national engagement pre and post 2023 general elections”. He encouraged participants to see the event as a window to learn and collaborate on how best to deepen the culture of unity and cohesion at this time for Nigeria’s development.
3. **Similarly, a detailed overview of the LEAD project** was presented by Sir. Bola Abimbola, Senior Program Manager and Head, Savannah Centre’s Program, Communication, and Advocacy unit. He availed the members of the Council of the Wise and the participants at the event the segments of the LEAD project which includes but not limited to:
 - i. In-depth desk-review on selected national documents (2005 National Political Conference by Obasanjo, 2014 Jonathan’s National Conference, 2007 Justice Mohammed Lawal Uwais Electoral Reform Report, 2002 Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission of Nigeria (Opota Panel Report) and, indeed, the APC 2018 Report on True Federalism).
 - ii. Actionable recommendations that the President (Presidency) could implement via executive powers without legislative approvals or authorisations.
 - iii. Actionable recommendations that the National Assembly should make (legislate on) to enable the executive arm to implement without running foul of the law, especially the 1999 Constitution (as amended).

4. **Goodwill messages** were taken by special guests of honour, **AIG (Dr.) Aderanti Cornelius, MNI (Rtd)**, Senior Special Assistant to the **President Muhamadu Buhari (SSA-P)** on Special Duties; **Mr. Clement Nwankwo, Executive Director**, Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC); and **Dr. Kole Shettima**, Africa Director, MacArthur Foundation.

One after the other, they all registered their appreciation to the Centre for organizing the inauguration and the national dialogue event at a time when the country was faced with enormous challenges. They commended the Centre for the choice of the Council Members. Similarly, they identified dialogue, collaboration, and the policy documents desk-reviewed by the Centre as the instruments needed by Nigeria to help her overcome challenges facing the country. They, therefore, called on the government to consider the Centre's recommendations in this regard. The inauguration of eminent Nigerians into the Council of the Wise was conducted by **AIG (Dr.) Aderanti Cornelius, MNI (Rtd)**. He affirmed the choice of the Council members and the strategic role of Savannah Centre in democratic advancement.

5. **Council Chairperson's Speech**

Hon. Justice Zainab Adamu Bulkachuwa, OFR, CFR in her speech, further expressed that the national security challenges in the country started in 2002 and continues to increase and spread nationwide. "In the North East, the wave of organised insecurity led by the Boko Haram terrorist and insurgency group is expanding to other regions of the country despite the efforts of the security agencies to defeat them. The other regions of the country are not left out of the insecurity complexities, with banditry and cattle rustling in the North West, herders-farmers clashes in the North Central, and kidnapping, cultism, communal clashes, among others, in the South."

She also observed that, in addition, the country had been grappling with the deep-seated culture of political and religious intolerance, widespread impunity, electoral and political violence which continue to threaten the peace and security of the nation. To assist in mitigating these challenges, the Savannah Centre's Council of the Wise was re-constituted, comprising committed and reputable Nigerians with a local and national voice to contribute in helping to save the Nigerian nation through strategic advocacy and engagements to promote constructive engagement which can enhance national unity and good governance through inclusivity, justice and fairness.

The Chairperson appreciated the Savannah Centre for the honor given to her to chair the council, and also to MacArthur Foundation for their continued support of causes that would unite Nigeria and strengthen its democratic institutions. She charged all participants to team up with the Council and work for the peace, unity and prosperity of the country irrespective of their faith, tribe, and political affiliation. She reiterated the imperative for all Nigerians to put in their best to make Nigeria work.

Similarly, the Council members individually commended the Savannah Centre for the initiative, especially with the forthcoming general elections and the present hardship in the ecosystem, which call for strategic intervention at all levels for the nation's common good. They each re-echoed a commitment to serve and contribute to nation-building as they engage all critical stakeholders.

The members unveiled the Engagement Documents which was an outcome of the In-depth Desk-Review on Selected National Documents (2005 National Political Conference by Obasanjo, 2014 Jonathan's National Conference, 2007 Justice Mohammed Lawal Uwais Electoral Reform report, 2002 Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission of Nigeria (Oputa Panel Report), and, indeed, the APC 2018 Report on True Federalism). The objective of the in-depth desk review on selected national documents component was to amongst other things:

- a. Isolate common grounds (per document) that can be taken forward for the sake of national unity in the following areas:
 - i. National Security
 - ii. Electoral Reform
 - iii. Fight against Corruption
 - iv. Restructuring
 - v. National Development
- b. Actionable recommendations that President (Presidency) could implement via executive powers without legislative approvals or authorizations.
- c. Actionable recommendations that the National Assembly should make (legislate on) to enable the executive arm to implement without running foul of the law, especially the 1999 constitution (as amended).

National Conversation on the Challenges of National Unity

The meeting continued with a paper presentation by Rev. Fr. George Ehusani, (Executive Director, Lux Terra Leadership Foundation) on Nigeria and the Challenges of National Unity: Beyond 2023 General Elections and a robust panel discussion moderated by Mr. Jide Ojo (Broadcaster and Public Affairs Analyst). The discussants were made up of the following seasoned professionals:

- i. Ms. Ann Kio Briggs, Founder, Agape Birthrights
- ii. Ms. Ayo Obe, Former President, Nigeria's Civil Liberties Organization (CLO)
- iii. Chief Ezenwa Nwagwu, Chairman of Partners for Electoral Reforms
- iv. Amb. M.K. Ibrahim, Former Nigerian Ambassador to Libya

Key Highlights during the National Dialogue:

- i. Justice and the rule of law are the first condition of humanity. The law is an anchor upon which the entire system of the society hinged.
- ii. The demand for justice and equal citizenship can only be met where the rule of law is firmly in place.
- iii. Nigeria was not designed to be the monster it has become today, recklessly devouring its children and callously inflicting pain and stress on the most talented and patriotic of its people.
- iv. In the run-up to the 2023 general elections, those of us who have not given up on

Nigeria are to ask the questions (and we owe it is our duty to ask): National Unity –at what cost? And on what term?

- v. We may retrace our steps back to the federalist route negotiated by the founding fathers and understand that the basis of the existence of Nigeria is mutual respect for the religious, ethnic and cultural diversities of all those in the union.
- vi. We need the network of intellectual Nigerians, from the north to the south and from the east to the west, who are prepared to engage in a wholesale peaceful revolt against a degenerate governance system that is daily inflicting fatal wounds on the people and turning the impoverished masses against themselves in an orgy of violence.
- vii. The delay in the justice system has contributed immensely to the current challenges of unity in the country.
- viii. Thirty million school children are a ticking time bomb in Nigeria if the needful is not done across the board.
- ix. The civil society must consciously engage in political participation at all levels.
- x. The need to break the hold of impunity and get the right people in office.
- xi. Council members must, as a matter of urgency, engage with state actors on these burning national issues.

Recommendations

- i Nigerians, irrespective of status, must join hands together to find solutions to challenges that divide us as a people.
- ii There is need to recognize and respect our diversity, as Nigeria is not the only heterogeneous society in the world.
- iii There is an urgent need to critically examine the constitution or possibly make a change of it for the sake of justice, national unity and development.
- iv The choice of referendum is not an option to be considered, in view of the fact that it is not an easy task. The BREXIT is a practical example for us to consider.
- v Nigerian political parties should be projected to be pro-people and to do away with the current political system, which projects masters and slave mentality.
- vi Nigerians must rise to be the critical stakeholders in the development of nation-building if unity and national cohesion were to be achieved. No one must be left behind in the process of building and re-building the Nigeria that works for all.

PHOTO SPEAKS



PHOTO SPEAKS

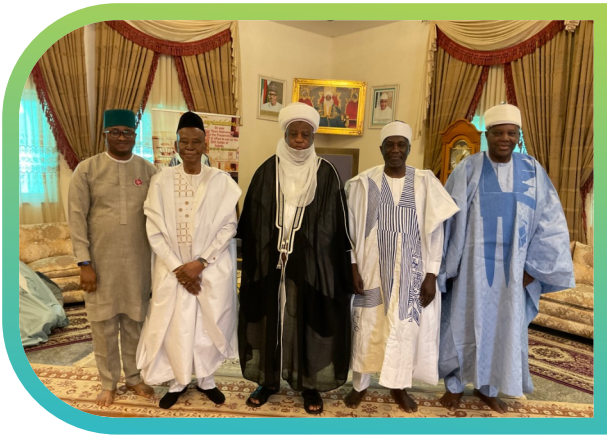


PHOTO SPEAKS



Activities of the Council

Council Members Post Inaugural Strategic Meeting

As a follow-up to the successful inauguration of the Council of the Wise committee on the 6th of June 2022, the Council members held a post-inaugural meeting on Tuesday 28th June 2022, at the board room of the Savannah Centre for Diplomacy, Democracy and Development (SCDDD), Abuja. It was a strategic/planning meeting where the Council members reviewed and adopted activity schedules/timelines and considered the possibility of a name change for the Council from the “Council of the Wise” to the “National Advocacy Council for Peaceful Elections and Good Governance (NACPEGG)” or any other name preferable to the Council, in order for the Council to commence its nationwide advocacy engagements in earnest. At the end of the discussion, the name “Council of the Wise” was retained.

The Council was able to produce an engagement (advocacy) action plan with a specific timeline to guide its pre-election national engagements in promoting violence-free elections, national unity and cohesion.



1. The Savannah Centre's Council of the Wise members, as part of the activity schedule to engage all stakeholders ahead of the 2023 general elections, commenced its advocacy and strategic engagement by visiting the leadership of the All-Progressive Congress (APC) at its national headquarters in Abuja on Thursday, 21st July 2023. The Council members were received by the APC national chairman, Senator Abudulahi Adamu, and the National Working Committee members.
2. Hon. Justice Zainab Adamu Bulkachuwa, OFR, CFR in her opening speech, recognised the party leaders and appreciated them for the audience. She went ahead to give a preamble of the Centre, explaining that it was established in 1993 but it officially started operations in 2014 as a Non-Governmental “Think-Tank” committed to conflict prevention and management, the promotion of a prosperous, politically stable,

developmentally sustainable and globally respected West Africa and African continent totally entrenched in the culture of democracy and good governance.

The Council's Chairperson cited that the country started to suffer serious setbacks in 1999 prompted by the way and manner the political class handled the electioneering processes. In order to grab political power, they employ all manners of rough tactics, such as hiring thugs to kill opponents or disrupt elections, hate speech, rigging, vote buying, stuffing of ballot boxes with fake ballot papers, etc. Unfortunately, there has also been renewed strain of political cum religious violence and intolerance which sharpened the destabilising fault lines in the country. More worrisome is the increasing rate of kidnapping, insurgency attacks, herders-farmers crisis, pipeline vandalism and banditry. There is the issue of faulty electoral process which led to contestation of subsequent election results, and most times violent reaction leading to loss of lives and destruction of properties. This she said was attributed to Nigeria's history of weak institutions and ineffective laws, largely due to the nonchalant attitude of the people charged with the responsibility of managing state institutions and the menace of corruption.

According to her, these situations should not be allowed to continue to jeopardise the values of democracy. Thus, Savannah Centre for Diplomacy, Democracy and Development (SCDDD) with the support of MacArthur Foundation in its efforts of contributing to nation-building and deepening the values of democracy, constituted a team of distinguished and patriotic Nigerians in 2015 led by Justice Mohammed Lawal Uwais GCON, retired Chief Justice of the Federation as the Council of the Wise, with a principal objective of enhancing the integrity of election among other things. The Council of the Wise members played a vital role in advocating for peaceful elections as well as Nigeria's safety and survival post-2015 election. In the same spirit, a new team has been reconstituted under her leadership, as Nigerians prepare for the 2023 general elections.

3. The Honourable Justice, on behalf of the Council of the Wise, appealed to the Chairman of APC and the Party's executive members to always abide by the party's Codes of Conduct and Constitution and to ensure internal democracy: inclusive participation, equity and fairness in the running of their party.

She also advised that the leadership should take steps to compel their members, candidates, and officials to fully comply with the electoral laws and guidelines issued by the electoral umpire (INEC) in order to develop a culture of integrity and trust. Hon. Justice Bulkachua also enunciated that it was the responsibility of the party to ensure that political campaigns were devoid of rancour, hate speech, inflammatory and unguided utterances capable of instigating violence. The Chairperson emphasized that Nigeria deserved a peaceful and transparent 2023 elections, observing that the development of the country was highly dependent on good governance, and the pathway is for the party leadership to play its role and ensure a free, fair, and transparent 2023 election. She concluded by appreciating the APC chairman and the members of the working committee for creating the time to meet with the Council members.

4. In his response, Senator Abdullahi Adamu, the APC Chairman, offered some prayers and welcomed the Council members, stating that they were the first to be hosted in the Secretariat Conference Hall after renovation. He hoped that the goodwill that came with the Council would remain in the party.

The Chairman, in alignment with the council's vision upon listening to the opening remarks by the Chairperson, noted that the country needed this kind of attention to address fundamental issues that affect the success or failure of our democratic processes. He commended the Council and the founder's vision and commitment to see that Nigeria succeed in its democratic endeavors. He welcomed the idea of developing some basis of working together with the Council to derive mutual benefit, using the Council's large outreach, institution, and beneficial expertise.

He said that Nigeria as a developing democracy is bound to make some mistakes. However, the success of any democracy is necessary; hence, both the leaders and followers have roles to play.

He further observed that the choice of leadership was one of the issues confronting the success of democracy, and he put forward some questions – “why do leaders fail? Why do personalities who are known for their outstanding characters fail whenever they are exposed to political offices? What are the roles of the followers?” There must be a meeting point. He pointed out that there was too much emphasis and expectation on leadership which in turn put a lot of pressure on them.

He recommended that we should not focus on the leaders alone, as they can only succeed if the followers also play their role well. He observed that the more we speak about corruption, the more of it became manifest. He, therefore, called on the Council of the Wise to help the APC, as the ruling party, correct some of the weaknesses that has been identified over the years. He assured the Council of the readiness of his party, the APC to make a difference. The Party Chairman re-emphasised the commitment of the working committee under his leadership to work with the Council; as the ruling party, it should lead by example.

In conclusion, he appreciated the Council for identifying the need to share its principles and ideals with the APC Leadership.

5. Further interactions were held in a closed-door session where Hon. Justice Bulchachuwa briefed the party leadership on the intention of the Council to interface with stakeholders and key actors in the Nigerian democratic space.
6. Amb. Brownson Dede appealed to the party leadership to dialogue with the people as interaction helps to douse tension and resolve differences, and avert disturbances for the people. Most times, people resort to criminal activities when nobody is speaking about the issues around them. He pointed that losses incurred by the country on the account of electoral violence could not be recovered in a short time. It takes many years

and a lot of resources to do that.

7. Mr. Uchenna Simon, in his contribution, re-echoed the need for the party and politicians to be mindful of utterances. He stated that a lot of misconceptions and conflicts arise from statements that were not properly guided. He also suggested that the party and its leadership should be more deliberate with the issue of youth inclusiveness not only in politics but in leadership as well as the governing process.
8. In closing, the Party Chairman appreciated the delegation for their robust contributions and strongly agreed with the submissions of Amb. Brownson Dede, while he reiterated the need for political actors to learn how to manage victories as well as defeats in elections, and also desist from using the youths for self-serving agendas. He also used the opportunity to appeal to the Council to take a critical look at our value system and the style of parenting in this modern times.

SAVANNAH CENTRE'S COUNCIL OF THE WISE ON LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS AND ACCOUNTABILITY
DIALOGUE (LEAD) II PROJECT, MEETING WITH PEOPLES REDEMPTION PARTY (PRP) LEADERSHIP HELD AT
THE PARTY NATIONAL SECRETARIAT ABUJA, ON WEDNESDAY, 4TH AUGUST, 2022

1. The Chairperson of the Council, Hon. Justice Zainab Bulkachuwa, OFR, CRF, the former President, Court of Appeal briefed the People Redemption Party's executive members about Savannah Centre's Council of the Wise and the Council's advocacy mission to the party.
2. Speaking on the principal message for the visit, the Hon. Justice, on behalf of the Council of the Wise members, appealed to the Chairman of PRP and the party executives to always abide by the party's Codes of Conduct and Constitution and to ensure internal democracy: inclusive participation, equity and fairness in the running of their party. She added that the Council also wish to advise that the leadership should also take steps to compel their members, candidates, and officials to fully comply with the electoral laws and guidelines issued by the electoral umpire (INEC) in order to develop a culture of integrity and trust. It is also the responsibility of the party to ensure that political campaigns are devoid of rancour, hate speech, inflammatory and unguided utterances capable of instigating violence. Nigeria deserved a peaceful and transparent 2023 elections. She observed that the development of the country is highly dependent on good governance and one of the pathways is for the party leadership to play its role and ensure a free, fair, and transparent 2023 election.
3. The Chairman of the PRP in his remark appreciated the Council for the visit. He gave an overview of the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), stating that the party is the oldest in Nigeria, precisely 72 years. Speaking on the challenges in the country, he said that Nigeria is highly blessed and richly endowed but lacked good governance. Its checks and balance system is not effective because of constant abuse.
4. Mr. Bello commended the constituted members of the Council, that he believes in their capacity by their track records to be able to assist in correcting many wrongs in society. He urged the council members to work towards identifying those wrongs and coming up with solutions, explaining that only those who believed in good governance would embark on the advocacy as the council members. He emphasized the need to engage those in leadership positions and have honest conversations about what was wrong and how to make corrections. He revealed that the party believed in the young generation and 60% of those contesting in the 2023 general election under the party were young people whom the party believed should be given the opportunity. He venerated his confidence in the capacity of the Council of the Wise to tell the leaders the truth and bridge the huge gaps in the polity.
5. He went further to assert that if the right things were not put in place, those who misgoverned the country for so long would win the election. However, since 2009 till



date, Mr. Bello believed that the election process had been going from bad to worst. He concluded by thanking the Council of the Wise for the initiative and promised to relay the Council's message to other members of the Executive Committee at the next meeting.

6. Political parties should not focus on the failures or what is wrong in the polity, rather on solutions to the challenges as this will enhance national development.
7. On the issue of the fight against corruption, the PRP Chairman opined that Savannah Centre as a Think Tank can be said to be on the same page with PRP. The Centre is very concerned about what is happening in the country. Reference was made to 2015 when the Centre voiced out some concerns through its publication after a policy analysis was done on the resources, the outcome almost led to the closing down of the Centre. He, however, explained that the truth must be the key element if we want to salvage the country. It is also vital to bring patriotic, sincere and honest people to lead the cause of change, and the Centre is committed to this through the Leadership Effectiveness and Accountability Dialogue (LEAD) Project.
8. The Hon. Justice also added that she has been part of every election tribunal in the country and most times after all tribunal recommendations were made, the challenge remains implementation. Constitutional matters take a long period of time and process which in turn slowed down the institutionalization of the recommendations into laws. For this reason, the issues keep re-emerging during the election period, thereby stalling the progress that should have changed the democratic process. She further informed the party leadership that the Council of the Wise would meet with other stakeholders on the need for a peaceful election and that it is the responsibility of everyone, including the electorate, to work together for the sake of the country.
9. The Hon. Justice presented a copy of the Centre's publications to the Party Chairman. Similarly, the Party Chairman presented copies of the Party's constitution to the Chairperson of the Council of the Wise.
10. At the end, the Chairman reiterated his appreciation for the good initiative of the Centre for creating the Council of the Wise and promised to work together with the Council to realise its objectives.

**COUNCIL OF THE WISE MEETING WITH INTER-PARTY ADVISORY COUNCIL (IPAC) LEADERSHIP
HELD AT THE PARTY NATIONAL SECRETARIAT ABUJA, ON WEDNESDAY 17th AUGUST, 2022**

1. The Savannah Centre's Council of the Wise members, as part of the activity schedule to engage all stakeholders ahead of the 2023 General Election, continued its advocacy and strategic engagement by visiting the leadership of the Inter-Party Advisory Council (IPAC) at its national headquarters in Abuja on the 17th August 2022. IPAC is an umbrella body of all registered political parties in Nigeria. Thus, it was an opportunity for the Council of the Wise to relay its message to the executives of the IPAC who also serve as their party's flagbearers in the 2023 general elections.
2. The Council Members were received by the IPAC Executive Committee. The meeting started at 12:30 p.m. with the introduction of the Council of the Wise by the Council Secretary, Amb. Sani Bala, who briefed the IPAC Executive about the foundation of the Council and the role it played, especially before, during and after the 2015 general elections. Similarly, Comrade Egbeola Olawale Martins, the IPAC Organizing Secretary, introduced the IPAC executive members present at the meeting. He explained that the IPAC was the umbrella body of all the 18 registered political parties in the country saddled with the core responsibility of advising political parties towards proper conduct aimed at deepening democracy by ensuring peaceful and credible elections.

3. Hon. Justice Zainab Adamu Bulchachuwa, in her speech, appreciated the executive members of IPAC for the time given to the Council members. She continued by giving a background on the Savannah Centre, which was established as a non-governmental think tank in 1993 by Prof. Ibrahim Gambari, CFR, a renowned scholar and seasoned diplomat. She explained that the Centre is focused on research, advocacy, and training directed at the promotion of peace, good governance, and development in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. It started its operation in 2014.



She reminded the IPAC leadership of the not-so-pleasant political history of the country since 1999, which was largely due to the manner the political class conducts the electioneering process, such as hiring thugs to kill or disrupt elections, hate speech, rigging, vote buying, stuffing of ballot boxes with fake ballot papers, etc. It is against this background of political upheaval that the Savannah Centre for Diplomacy, Democracy and Development (SCDDD), with the support of MacArthur Foundation in 2014, came up with the idea of establishing an intervention body known as the Council of the Wise, whose activities positively impacted the 2015 general elections. She added that the Centre once again reconstituted the Council to play a vital role in advocating for a free, fair and all-inclusive 2023 general elections. To this end, Hon. Justice Zainab, on behalf of the Council of the Wise members, appealed to IPAC to ensure that political parties operate in accordance with its code of conduct and fully comply with the electoral laws and guidelines issued by the electoral umpire (INEC) in order to develop a culture of

integrity and trust. Similarly, the Council should ensure that members desist from utterances that would compromise national unity by instigating violence.

4. In response to the Council of the Wise's Chairperson, the IPAC National Chairman, Engr. Yabagi Sani, who was also the National Chairman of the Action Democratic Party (ADP) as well as the presidential candidate of the party, commended the efforts of the Council towards ensuring the survival of Nigeria after the 2023 general elections. He stated that the calibre of personalities that constitute the Council is indeed worthy to be called the Council of the Wise; for they have given their best to the country and were ready to engage all stakeholders to ensure that the most important activity of the land is done in a very credible, peaceful and all-inclusive manner, devoid of crisis.

According to him, IPAC stood on nothing short of peaceful, transparent and credible elections come 2023, and so far, It had worked to ensure the passage of the electoral bill, and is also working to ensure that the legal framework for enforcing punishment for electoral offenders is put in place. However, the challenge, just like other policies in the country, has always been implementation. He further pinpointed that the leadership selection process is flawed and to get it right, the process must to be sanitized from the primaries. He also emphasised the importance of having a credible and transparent election in Nigeria.

Engr. Yabagi considered the advocacy visit as very informative and highly educative, and he recommended that the council should consider organising a workshop where the members of IPAC could participate and learn from the wealth of wisdom and experience to deepen democratic principles and ensure a better future for the country.

In conclusion, IPAC Chairman promised to share the message of the Council of the Wise to other members and deepen the interaction for the betterment of the country.

The national organising secretary of IPAC called for a close session with the Council of the Wise members. Key highlights of the session include:

- i. Amb. Sani explained that the close session was to enable both members to share some experience, especially issues relating to the conduct of the election as well as recommendation for a successful, violence-free and fair general election.
- ii. The issue of vote buying is considered as the biggest challenge as reported in the recent elections in the state. It was agreed that efforts must be made by political parties and candidates to overcome the menace.
- iii. The monetisation of the political process by big parties: what can the Council do to ensure a level playing field for all political parties?
- iv. The need to intensify sensitisation on the imperativeness of a violence-free election.

- v. The level of violence is enough. It is high time to put a stop to election violence, and political parties have a major role to play in ensuring a free and fair election. Members are likely to act, to a large extent, what is practised in the party. He added that the issue of vote buying is very dangerous to our democracy as a country.
- vi. Nigeria has experienced election dynamics from 1999 to date. There is a need for deliberate action, specifically in ensuring youth participation. The political process, over the years, has been recycled by the same politicians.
- vii. The major challenges in the country, especially insecurity is the symptom of the relegation of the people at the grassroots. The constant kidnapping and banditry are merely a way of protesting against the neglect. Secondly, the remuneration of political office holders is unnecessarily huge, hence anyone who gets a political position automatically becomes a millionaire. Also, most often than not competence is compromised. Only those whom the State's Chief Executive considers loyalists win an election because the state electoral bodies are controlled by the state governors. Most times, the aggrieved parties revolt against the system due to a lack of trust.
- viii. Things are not going the way it is expected in the country. Although Nigeria is a growing democracy, progress is still slow. The failure of nation's leadership is the problem. The poverty rate is so high that people are ready to sell their votes, and some others are unaware of the implication of selling their votes. He called on the Council to support IPAC in sensitising the public on the issue of vote buying.

On 27th of September 2022, the Savannah Centre's Advocacy Council, also known as the Council of the Wise, chaired by Hon. Justice Zainab Adamu Bulkachuwa, OFR, CFR, President Court of Appeal (Retired) with the membership of eminent elder-statesmen and women selected from the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria, held a World Press Conference ahead of the commencement of the political parties campaign for the 2023 general elections. The press conference highlighted key issues that should top the agendas of political parties as they go into the campaign, with a special appeal to relevant stakeholders on putting the unity of Nigeria above personal interest. Some of the major highlights and demands of the council include but are not limited to the following:

- i. The Council congratulated Mr. President for assenting the electoral bill which largely accommodated the electoral reforms recommended by Justice Muhammad Lawal Uwais Committee. The Council hoped that Mr. President would follow up by ensuring that public institutions and officials comply with the new electoral laws.
- ii. The Council admonished the federal government to release INEC budget in good time in order to conduct a credible general election in 2023.
- iii. INEC should make available all materials and personnel required for the 2023 elections are made available and deployed to the voting centres in time.
- iv. The Council called on all political parties to abide by their constitutions, the electoral laws and guidelines issued by INEC in order to prevent violence or any act that would adversely affect the integrity of the elections.
- v. To the Presidential, Governorship, National and State Assemblies candidates, the Council advised that they should canvass the support of the electorates with sincerity, dignity, maturity, and mutual respect. Adding that, their electioneering campaigns should be devoid of rancor, hate speech, and inflammatory/unguided utterances capable of instigating violence.



The press conference was covered and published by some of the reputable media organisations in Nigeria, such as TVC, ARISE, CHANNELS Television, ITV, NTA, Deutschi Welle (Radio Germany), Radio France, Voice of America, Eagle FM, Vision FM, Farin Wata TV, NAN, etc.

As part of the strategic consultations and stakeholders' engagement ahead of the 2023 general elections, the Savannah Centre's Advocacy Council on National Unity and Cohesion (also known as, the Council of the Wise), led by Justice Zainab Adamu Bulkachuwa, OFR, CFR, President Court of Appeal (Retired) was at the Presidential Villa on the 14th of October 2022. The team was received by the Chief of Staff to the President, Prof. Ibrahim Gambari, CFR on behalf of the President who was out of the country. Crucial issues were discussed regarding the unity of the country at the pre-and post-2023 general elections, especially on the need for peaceful and credible general elections. Some of the major highlights and request of the Council include but are not limited to the following:

- a. The Council appealed to the President to ensure that the INEC is provided with all the resources it requires for the conduct of the elections because Mr. President's declared desire to leave an indelible legacy of a successful election would not be realised if INEC was not fully empowered to assert its independence in the conduct of the 2023 elections.
- b. The Council expected the Chief of Staff to follow up with presidential orders and instructions to the security agencies and other public institutions to comply with the provisions of the electoral law and INEC regulations in order to prevent the outbreak of violence before, during, and after the 2023 elections.
- c. The Council's Chairperson reiterated the Council's willingness, as a partner, to continue engaging the stakeholders, preaching peace, unity, and progress Nigeria.
- d. Nigerians should disabuse their minds of sentiments, bitterness, or hate for the good of our country, and elect a President who demonstrates greater capacity by a wide margin to transform Nigeria.

In his respects, the Chief of Staff congratulated the Savannah Centre for the resuscitation of the Council of the Wise at a very convenient time. He recalled the remarkable achievement of the Council prior to the 2015 general elections. As a member of the council then, he commended the achievements of the present Council so far and encouraged the chairperson and members not to be deterred by the challenges posed by the enemies of progress and the prophets of doom. He revealed that the President was determined to provide INEC with all the funds approved in good time to avoid any embarrassment. The Chief of Staff also assured the Council that he would convey the messages of the Council to the President immediately on his return. He also promised to personally follow up all the Presidential instructions to the institutions with a view to ensuring peaceful, credible and acceptable elections in 2023.



Finally, Professor Gambari expressed his sincere confidence in all the members of the Council and reiterated his willingness to collaborate with the Council in the national interest.

Advocacy Council's Engagement with SDP Presidential Candidate

The Savannah Centre's Council of the Wise, on Friday 20th January 2023 as part of its strategic activities to advocate for a peaceful 2023 election, and an issue-based campaign enshrined in the context of national unity and cohesion, paid an advocacy visit to the presidential candidate of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), Prince Adewole Adebayo, in his campaign headquarters. The visit was led by Engr. Ebele Okeke, OON, CFR who appealed to the party's presidential candidate and members of his Executive Committee and Campaign Council to read the mood of the nation in their conduct, and abide by the party's Codes of Conduct and Constitution. That it was imperative to national cohesion prominent in their messaging and actions throughout the electioneering campaign and beyond. The Council reinforced the need for campaigns to be devoid of rancor, hate speech, inflammatory and unguided utterances capable of instigating violence. The Chairperson urged the candidate and the campaign council to contribute in promoting a political culture of electoral peace, harmony and credibility in Nigeria.



The SDP Presidential candidate expressed appreciation for the Council's and MacArthur Foundation's efforts and care for the peace and cohesion of the country. He pointed out that the goal of the council was well-aligned with that of the SDP as a political party, and that the party would conform with electoral principles and would totally shun violence or anything that could cause violent conflict and disunity in the country. He noted that the Council's intervention was apt and timely, especially considering the high level of integrity and good reputations of its members.

The Council's engagement with the presidential candidate and leadership of the SDP provided an opportunity for the Council to speak to the leadership of the SDP on the imperative of national unity and cohesion beyond the 2023 general elections.

The engagement resulted in a commitment by the candidate and the leadership of the party to remain civil and put Nigeria first, irrespective of the outcome of the presidential election.



Council of the Wise's Advocacy Engagements with the Deji of Akure and other Stakeholders in Akure, Ondo State

The Council of the Wise was on an advocacy meeting with the Deji of Akure, Oba Aladetoyinbo Ogunlade Aladelusi, Odundun II at the Deji Palace, Akure, Ondo State as well as a strategic visit to the Commissioner of Police, Ondo State, Oyediran Oyeyemi, on the 23rd of January 2023. The Council members were well received by the stakeholders and all gave their commitment to play their respective roles in promoting national unity and cohesion vis-à-vis a peaceful 2023 general election in the state and in the South West region. HRH, the Deji of Akure assured the Council that all the traditional rulers in the state had been engaging their subject not take part in any form of violence before, during and after the elections. The Commissioner of Information and Culture, Chief Mrs. Ademola-Olateju, who also interfaced with the Council on behalf of the state government, assured that the Ondo State government, led by Arakunri Rotimi Akeredolu, was fully committed to a united, peaceful and prosperous Nigeria, and would continue to work with the Council to promote its national mandate on national unity and cohesion.



The Savannah Centre's LEAD II Council of the Wise members led by His Excellency, Amb. Brownson Dede was on a strategic consultative engagement with the Sultan of Sokoto, His Eminence, Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar, CFR, MNI and his Emirate Council at the Sultan's Palace in Sokoto State. The visit was part of the Council's last leg pre-election lined up activities aimed towards promoting a peaceful and credible 2023 general elections nationwide vis-à-vis promoting national unity and cohesion, before, during, and after the 2023 polls.

The Council expressed its appreciation to the Sultan, His Eminence Alhaji Sa'ad Abubakar CFR for the crucial role he had been playing to foster national unity, religious tolerance, and mutual respect which had distinguished him as a strong rallying figure whose actions have been nationalistic and geared toward the protection of the common man.

The Council members recognised that the unwavering commitment of His Eminence at the National Peace Committee as its co-chair accounted for the success achieved in preventing violence before, during, and after the national election in 2015 and 2019. Thus, the Council of the Wise encouraged the Sultan to continue the advocacy for violence-free 2023 general elections throughout Nigeria to build on the success achieved so far.

His Eminence received the Council members in his inner chamber alongside members of his traditional council. He commended the Centre for always birthing nationalistic and impactful interventions and gave his commitment to working with the Centre and the Council. He explained that duties of every leader given by God included peacebuilding in order to ensure safety of the common man. The Sultan applauded the Council for engaging most of the presidential candidates and party leadership. He shared the Council's view on rules of engagement which should be on issues-based campaigns if national unity and cohesion must be sustained or improved upon. He seized the opportunity to appeal to the politicians, especially the campaign spokespersons to be careful in their rhetoric and stop insulting the candidates of opposing parties. That they must strengthen the sensibility of the country by desisting from utterances that would overheat the polity and causes further disharmony in the country. He also challenged the youth to be careful and self-disciplined in the way and manner they use social media to pull the country down, as the consequences of a disunited Nigeria would have a more damaging effect on the youth and women. He concluded by thanking the MacArthur Foundation for supporting the activity of the Council and he requested that the engagement should continue beyond the 2023 elections period.



On Friday 17th February 2023, the Savannah Centre's Council of the Wise paid an interactive visit to Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, GCFR, and the former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in continuation of its advocacy for non-violent 2023 general elections in Nigeria as well as promotion of national unity and cohesion. The team was led by Engr. Ebele Okeke, CFR, the former Head of Service of the Federation. The Council appreciated His Excellency, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, GCFR, for the crucial role he has been playing to foster national unity, religious tolerance and mutual respect in the country, and by extension, the continent of Africa, particularly in brokering peace in Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea Bissau.

The Council of the Wise, therefore, requested his personal involvement in engendering mutual respect, understanding, and commitment to national unity and cohesion among the leading presidential candidates irrespective of the outcome of the election. His Excellency, Dr.



Jonathan accepted the request of the Council and promised to do everything in his power to ensure that there would be no any post-election crisis in the country. He stated that he would be working with both ECOWAS and Commonwealth election observers in making sure nothing untoward happens after the elections, having conceded to a lost in a general election himself, because the peace of Nigeria is the peace of the African continent.

The LEAD Council of the Wise Pre-Election Press Conference

On 21st February 2023, the Centre organised the Council of the Wise Pre-Election Press Conference as the last activity in preparation for the 2023 general elections scheduled for 25th February and March 11th 2023. The primary purpose of the press conference was to speak to the mood of the nation ahead of the general elections and to plead to all the stakeholders, both state and non-state actors, to conduct themselves in a manner that would prevent the occurrence of violence or disunity in the country. During the press conference, the Council stated its conviction about the ability of Nigerians to once more prove the prophets of doom wrong, by collectively working together irrespective of political, tribal and religious affiliations in putting “first” the unity and wellbeing of the country ahead of personal gain. The Council further posited that during the 2023 elections, political parties and their candidates, INEC, and the Security Agencies owe it a duty to the Nigerian people to improve upon and consolidate the democratic successes so far achieved in Nigeria since 1999.

The Council appealed to the electorates to turn out en mass and cast their votes peacefully in order to strengthen democracy in Nigeria. The Council once again called on all the political parties to abide by their constitutions, the electoral laws and guidelines issued by INEC in order to prevent violence or any act that would adversely affect the integrity of the elections. The Council finally called on all the candidates to demonstrate leadership and courage by accepting the results of the election and any dissatisfaction with the outcome should be taken up with the courts as provided by the constitution, not through violence or any act that could threaten the unity of the country.

The press conference was covered and published by some of the reputable media organisations in Nigeria, such as TVC, ARISE, CHANNELS Television, ITV, NTA, Vision FM, Farin Wata TV, NAN, etc.

**STATEMENT BY THE COUNCIL OF THE WISE OF SAVANNAH CENTRE FOR DIPLOMACY,
DEMOCRACY, AND DEVELOPMENT ON THE 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS**

“THE NIGERIA NIGERIANS WANT AND THE LEADERS THEY NEED”

1. Ladies and gentlemen of the Press, I welcome all of you to this press briefing organised by the Savannah Centre for Diplomacy, Democracy and Development (SCDDD). The Centre, as you all know, is a non-governmental organisation that is committed to research, advocacy, and training directed at the promotion of peace, good governance and development in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. Since its inception in 2014, the Centre has carried out a series of roundtable discussions, workshops and conferences that seek to address the nexus between peace and security, democratisation, and development with support from partners and philanthropists.
2. As its contribution to the national efforts to entrench democracy and promote national unity in Nigeria, the SCDDD, with support from MacArthur Foundation in 2014, came up with the idea of establishing an intervention body known as the COUNCIL OF THE WISE, with membership drawn among men and women of great knowledge, integrity, and influence from the six geopolitical zones to engage as many of the stakeholders as possible and impress on them to play their respective roles effectively and sincerely towards addressing the national challenges of governance, especially the thorny issues surrounding the conduct of national elections.
3. Indeed, the Council played a very important role in ensuring free, fair, violence-free and credible elections in 2015 through its numerous engagements with many stakeholders across the country. Counting on the successes of the Council in 2015, the SCDDD, under its advocacy project of Leadership Effectiveness and Accountability Dialogue II with support from MacArthur Foundation, reconstituted the Council in the run-up to the 2023 national elections under my leadership. The Council is expected to play the same role it played in 2015, with a view to ensuring the emergence of a congenial socio-political atmosphere for peaceful, credible, free, fair, and violence-free 2023 elections.
4. The Council, therefore, wishes to seize this opportunity to appeal to the Federal Government to provide the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) with all the resources it requires for the conduct of the 2023 elections, especially the timely release of funds. Mr. President is kindly requested to complement his evident determination for a successful election by also providing all the security agencies with the resources and leadership to enable them prevent any violence before, during, and after the elections. They will also provide adequate security for the voters to cast their votes without hindrance.
5. The Council wishes to congratulate Mr. President for assenting to the electoral bill which largely accommodated the electoral reforms recommended by Justice Muhammad Lawal Uwais Committee. It is the hope of the Council that Mr. President would follow up by ensuring that public institutions and officials comply with the electoral laws.

6. The INEC should ensure that all materials and personnel required for the 2023 elections are made available and deployed to the voting centres in time. The integrity of the elections largely depends on its management by INEC who should be guided by the remarkable success so far achieved from 2015 to date. As a neutral and independent institution, INEC must be FAIR and JUST to all political parties, candidates, and electorates. The use of electronic gadgets and other modern devices by INEC is a welcome development and must be properly managed in order to enhance the integrity of the elections and to fully reflect the choices of the people.
7. The Council hereby calls on all the political parties to abide by their constitutions, the electoral laws and guidelines issued by INEC in order to prevent violence or any act that would adversely affect the integrity of the elections. It is very necessary for them to discharge their responsibilities to their members and indeed the nation, without recourse to violence. Leaderships of political parties should take steps to compel their members and officials to fully comply with the electoral laws and guidelines issued by INEC in order to develop a culture of integrity and trust.
8. To the Presidential, Governorship, National and State Assemblies Candidates, the Council's sincere advice is that they should canvass the support of the electorates with sincerity, dignity, maturity, and mutual respect. Their electioneering campaigns should be devoid of rancor, hate speech, inflammatory and unguided utterances capable of instigating violence. It is imperative that campaigns are based on issues and not personal attacks, vendetta, thuggery or violence.
9. The Council wishes to express its appreciation to the religious leaders for the prayers they have been offering for peace, unity and progress to prevail in the country and to also urge them to intensify their prayers. The Council equally appeal to them to ensure that their adherents promote religious harmony, tolerance and mutual respect so that the devil will have no means of creating any misunderstanding or hatred between adherents of the religions in Nigeria.
10. The Council is convinced that the traditional rulers have a very crucial role to play in preventing instigators of conflicts from arising in their respective domains. They also possess the mechanism of controlling any situation that could lead to violence. They are kindly requested to continue proving the right leadership to their people in such a way that the 2023 general elections will be free from violence. They should educate their subjects to avoid hate speeches or insults in expressing their support to the candidates of their choice.
11. The unpleasant experience that followed the 2011 general elections which recorded the highest casualty when lives of over of 1,000 people were lost their lives in that mayhem, especially in the Northern States is still fresh in our minds. The uncountable number of Nigerians being killed by bandits and terrorists every day is becoming unbearable. Certainly, Nigeria does not deserve this wanton loss of lives and property. Therefore, it is in the electorates' best interest to ensure that they cast their votes in peace so that they

elect the leaders they need.

12. The youth as the future leaders of the nation should be wiser by refusing to allow themselves to be used against the people. No youth should allow himself or herself to be used as an agent of hate speech or violence in the coming elections and beyond.
13. The Council appreciate the Press, both the print and the electronic media, in the roles they have been playing so far. However, they must continue to be impartial umpires in reporting events before, during, and after the 2023 general elections without fear or favour. It is important to emphasize the need for the fourth estate of the realm to sanitise itself by weeding out the unqualified or fake journalists who engage in sensationalism instead of journalism.
14. Finally, the Council is fully convinced that the ability of Nigerians to once more prove the prophets of doom wrong largely depends on the conduct of the Political Parties, the Candidates, INEC, the Security Agencies and the Electorates during the forthcoming 2023 elections. They owe it a duty to the Nigerian people to improve upon and consolidate the democratic successes so far achieved in Nigeria. We all must work towards getting the NIGERIA NIGERIANS WANT AND THE LEADERS THEY NEED. A Nigeria that is united, peaceful, stable, prosperous, economically strong, and respected by all.
15. Thank you very much and have a pleasant day.

Hon. Justice Zainab Adamu Bulkachuwa, OFR. CFR

President Court of Appeal (Retired)

Chairperson, Savannah Centre's Council of the Wise

27th September 2022.

Section A:

1. Protocol and Recognitions
2. The Savannah Centre for Diplomacy, Democracy, and Development (SCDDD) was established as a Non-Governmental “Think-Tank” in Abuja in 1992 but officially commenced its operations in February 2014. The foundational objectives of the Centre comprise conflict prevention and management, the promotion of a prosperous, politically stable, developmentally sustainable and globally respected West Africa and African continent totally entrenched in the culture of democracy and good governance.

Section B:

Why the Savannah Centre Council of the Wise was constituted and its potential contributions in helping to save the Nigerian Nation:

3. Way back in 2002, Nigeria started witnessing renewed strains of political cum religious violence and intolerance, political instability, armed banditry, militancy and organised kidnapping in some sub-regions of the country. It was all tales of gloom about Nigeria’s impending implosion and collapse. In January 2005, for example, the proceedings of a one-day conference of USA experts on Sub-Saharan Africa sponsored by the US National Intelligence Council expressed concerns about Nigeria’s collapse in 2015. By 2009, the North East corner of Nigeria particularly witnessed another wave of organised insecurity led by Boko Haram terrorism and insurgency group. The group has since grown in devastating strength despite efforts by the Nigerian state to negotiate or defeat them militarily. With the complexities of the insurgency, potentials of political violence, pre, during, and after the forthcoming national elections, the Nigerian social media and certain segments of the society had since touted the Boko Haram insurgency as the final evidence of the much predicted collapse of the country.
4. The resurgent insurgency in the North East, banditry and cattle rustling in the North West, herders-farmers clashes in the North Central, and kidnapping, cultism, communal clashes, among others in the South, continue to threaten the peace and security of the nation. Security agencies seem not able to keep pace with wide public demands for better protection of lives and properties of citizens. This has given rise to various agitations for State Police and/or Community Policing. The government’s hesitant response has led to the formation of regional security organisations, such as the “Amotekun” in the South West, “Shege Kafasa” in the North West and “Odinigwe” in the South East based on the argument that the adoption of the Civilian Joint Task Force in the North East was an endorsement of the need for regional security outfits. While these issues remain unresolved, the wave of insecurity increases with devastating consequences on national unity and development, hence the need for urgent solutions.
5. The Savannah Centre’s about the possible threat to Nigeria’s unity was based on the

background of Nigeria's deep-seated culture of political intolerance, widespread impunity, electoral and political thuggery, political violence and crises, precarious and vulnerable electoral process, ongoing terrorism and insurgency, economic hardship and hunger, youth unemployment and incomplete or unwholesome implementation of various reports from national conferences and committees, such as; 2005 National Political Conference by Obasanjo, 2014 Jonathan's National Conference, 2007 Justice Mohammed Lawal Uwais Electoral Reform Report, 2002 Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission of Nigeria (Oputa Panel Report), and, indeed, the APC 2018 report on True Federalism, amongst others. The SCDDD is worried that all these unwholesome developments if continuously not precisely handled could impact very negatively on the 2023 general elections and national unity.

6. The SCDDD established the Council of the Wise, comprising of non-partisan, non-religious, reputable and committed men and women with local and national voice, who would act in interlocutory and mediatory capacities. More importantly, the Council of the Wise also consists of critical stakeholders in the nation-building process and project, and who will in their respective roles, utilise their enormous influence, skill, moral positions, and convening power to foster a peaceful 2023 election that focuses on nation-building.

Section C:

Potential and real contributions of the Council of the Wise in Saving Nigeria:

7. The SCDDD is indeed concerned that despite 2005 National Political Conference by Obasanjo, 2014 Jonathan's National Conference, 2007 Justice Mohammed Lawal Uwais Electoral Reform Report, 2002 Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission of Nigeria (Oputa Panel Report), and indeed, the APC 2018 report on True Federalism amongst others on similar subject that the atmosphere in the country is ripe with tension and uncertainty. With the forthcoming general elections, the Nigerian state no doubt needs help to save it from the machinations of its adversaries. In this direction, an enormous sense of responsibility and patriotism would be required to which voluntarism and patriotism are crucial. It is in this particular regard that the Savannah Centre in 2015 first constituted the Council of the Wise under the leadership of Justice Mohammed Lawal Uwais, Chief Justice Nigeria (Retired), and today, the same committee is being re-constituted under my Leadership, Hon. Justice Zainab Adamu Bulkachuwa, CFR, OFR, President of the Court of Appeal (Retired) to continue with this important national assignment designed to assist in continuous engagement of critical stakeholders nationwide in tackling perceived challenges of State and Nation-building.
8. The potential and real contributions of the "Council of the Wise" would include but may not necessarily be limited to: unifying the various ethnic, religious, political, and socioeconomic groupings in Nigeria through strategic advocacy and engagements to promote constructive engagement to enhance national unity and good governance through inclusivity, justice, and fairness.

Section D:

Appreciation and Conclusion:

9. Permit me to specially appreciate the board and management of the Savannah Centre for Diplomacy, Democracy, and Development (SCDDD), who find my colleagues and I in the Council worthy of being assigned this nationalistic and selfless duties. Also, to the MacArthur Foundation, especially Dr. Kole Shettima, Africa Director, MacArthur Foundation, who over the years have been supporting causes that would continuously unite Nigeria and strengthen its democratic institutions across the board.

10. Finally, as I conclude, it is important for me to mention that everyone of us owes it a duty as a Nigerian to team up and work for the peace, unity, and prosperity of our country irrespective of our faith, tribes, and sometimes political leaning. Nigeria is our own and we must make it work.

11. May Allah bless everyone of you.

Hon. Justice Zainab Adamu Bulkachuwa, OFR. CFR

President Court of Appeal (Retired)

Chairperson, Savannah Centre's Council of the Wise

6th June 2023

ABOUT SAVANNAH CENTRE

Savannah Centre for Diplomacy, Democracy and Development (SCDDD) is a non-governmental organization committed to research, advocacy training and policy analysis in the areas of conflict prevention, management, democracy and sustainable development in Nigeria and Africa. The SCDDD is leading strategic discussions on inclusive governance for sustainable development, in order to promote human security, sustainable peace, good governance, rule of law and human rights in Nigeria and Africa, shaping public policy through research and knowledge sharing. We are committed to improving the democratic and governance space through advocacy and the provision of context-specific training and solutions to governments, policy makers and some non-state actors.

