

At NBA confab, calls for Jail terms, credible voters' register top demands for 2011 election

Discussants at a Plenary Session in the on-going Annual General Conference of the Nigeria Bar Association (NBA) in Kaduna, including the Ondo State Governor, Dr Olusegun Mimiko and his counterpart from Akwa-Ibom State, Obong Godswill Akpabio on Tuesday called for jail terms for electoral offenders, saying such a stiff sanction would curb electoral malpractices in the country.

Specifically, they had harsh words for the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) which they insisted must fashion out credible voters' register that would provide opportunity for all Nigerians to exercise their voting rights without manipulation in favour of any political party. The electoral body was also rapped for not only flouting the Electoral Act in the 2007 election in some states by announcing the governorship results in Abuja instead of the state headquarters of the Commission as stipulated by the Act saying but for also foot-dragging in prosecuting known electoral offenders in the 2007 Election.

In his own submission, the Ondo State Governor, Dr Olusegun Mimiko who managed to retrieve his mandate after 22 months at the courts posited that INEC must ensure that no public office holders, irrespective of their political status should be allowed to monitor election process on Election day with multiple security personnel, stressing that such action was capable of intimidating both the electoral officials and the electorate.

His words: "No public office holder must go about during election with multiple policemen and other security personnel. A situation where some top government officials go from one polling centre to another with hundreds of policemen on an election day under the guise that they are monitoring election must be put to an end. Even those of us, who are State governors, can only be allowed to monitor election with our Aide De Camps and Chief Security Officers, no more".

Mimiko also regretted that majority of Nigerians have, for many years, been denied the opportunity of electing their genuine representatives due to political and financial influence by few politicians who imposed their own candidates on the people for their selfish interest. He, however, enjoined Nigerians to rise to the challenge of ensuring that their votes count in the next year general election.

“For so long, the powerful few have elected leaders on behalf of the weaker majority under the guise of election that are neither credible nor represent the will of the majority of the people. Regrettably, the monopoly of control of our security forces by the federal government have been abused by partisan government officials and political leaders of the ruling party at the federal level to undermine all democratic and election processes,” Mimiko stated.

While maintaining that for democracy to thrive in the country, Mimiko insisted that political parties must ensure internal democracy while INEC, as election umpire, must be transparent during collation exercise and ensure credible voters’ register. He equally appealed to the judiciary to be impartial and fearless while urging the Federal government to empower INEC for it to discharge its duties efficiently without political influence.

Governor Godswill Akpabio of Akwa Ibom State in his in his speech called for equal opportunity for all eligible voters to choose their leaders with a call on Nigerians to rise to the challenge of ensuring that their votes count in future elections.

Akpabio, who described the option of electronic voting machine, as being clamoured fro in several quarters, as not the best for the nation’s democracy, noted that it could be manipulated by its operators. To him, only Nigerians themselves could ensure free and fair election in the country.

In his contribution, the Action Congress of Nigeria (CAN) member of the House of Representatives from Lagos State, Mr Femi Gbajabiamila, tasked Nigerians to take their destiny in their own hands by ensuring that their votes not only count but be willing to defend them stressing that credible election would make appreciable impact on the nation.

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