

**TEXT OF REMARKS BY SENATOR KEN NNAMANI, PRESIDENT,
SENATE OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA, ON
DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA AND THE 2007 ELECTION AT THE
CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES,
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**“The 2007 Elections and the Prospects of Democracy in
Nigeria”**

I begin by stating candidly that Nigerians want democracy. We want democracy to survive in Nigeria. The dismal experience of past military dictatorship has assured Nigerians of the value of democratic governance. Having tasted the bitter waters of tyranny, Nigerians are thirsty for liberty and freedom that come with democracy. Nigerians are determined to fight for democracy. All the disagreements, debates and contestations over governance issues in Nigeria should be seen as eloquent expressions of this desire to keep the nation on the path of democracy.

But, Nigerians also realise that democracy is a journey not a destination. Democracy is a process. As a process, it can be accelerated or reversed. We cannot rest on our oars and assume that democracy in Nigeria has entered into an auto-pilot. There is no cruise-control. If we fail to deliberately steer Nigeria straight on the path of democratic practice we may witness a regression. We have seen regressions and relapses in countries where democratic governance was launched with much fanfare to awake us to the challenges of keeping to the straight path of constitutionalism and the rule of law.

The conduct of the National Assembly during the last debate on the amendment of the constitution is

evidence of the realization of the fragility of democratic governance in Nigeria and the need for caution and deliberate speed. In my appeal to my colleagues in the legislature to uphold legislative due process in considering the proposed amendment I argued that democratic societies survive the inevitable crisis of politics only if managers of state institutions deliberately uphold the rules of law and the norms of fairness, justice and equity. I warned every Senator of the traumatic consequences of allowing parochial personal or group interests to trump the interests of sustaining democracy in Nigeria. My colleagues heeded my appeal and we steadied the ship of state on the course of democracy and averted the possibility of a major political crisis that could pulverise the foundations of democratic governance in Nigeria.

Today, friends of Nigeria congratulate the National Assembly for its stand and vote for democracy in Nigeria. But, while we reflect we must keep an eye on the 2007 elections in Nigeria. Although, democracy is not only about free and fair elections, free and fair elections are the heart of democratic governance. Elections have been the critical decider of the discontinuity of democracy in Nigeria. Students of Nigeria politics can easily pick up the carcasses of democratic experiments in Nigeria. These experiments failed largely because of failure to guarantee orderly succession and transition through credible and legitimate elections. The conflagration that consumed the First Republic (1963-1965) arose from disputation about election results. The second republic (1979-1983) failed largely under the dead weight of incredible election results in 1983 general election. It is the

illegitimate nullification of the 1993 Presidential election results by the military government that set up chains of ugly events that culminated in the dictatorship of General Abacha.

Elections matter because without orderly succession, democracies may not consolidate. In a multicultural and multi-religious country like Nigeria credible elections provide platforms for different constituents of the republic to continue to collaborate to promote the good of all. The 2007 election is arguably the most important election in Nigeria. It is the election that can make or mar Nigeria's aspiration to become a modern market economy that provides prosperity, security and happiness for its citizens. It is an election that determines whether Nigeria can entrench due process in its politics and end the discontinuities that endanger economic wellbeing of Nigerian citizens.

I am particularly worried about the 2007 elections because of its significance to the continuity of the economic reform policies of the Obasanjo government. Since 1999, Nigeria has embarked on ambitious economic reforms whose totality ensures sound macroeconomic framework for economic prosperity. The reforms have started yielding fruits in term of fiscal prudence and sound economic fundamentals that have earned B-plus from international rating agencies. Now imagine what will become of these reforms if the 2007 elections end in fracas. With the tension on the agitation for power shift between northern and southern political elites and the violent struggle in the Niger Delta for the right to control oil resources, how will the nation survive incredible and illegitimate

elections in 2007? So much is staked on the 2007 elections that we must increase our interventions to ensure that the elections are free and fair and the results acceptable to the Nigerian electorates.

What are the trends that should guide our intervention on 2007 election? There is cheery news here. The National Assembly has enacted a new electoral law to guide the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in conducting elections in 2007. This law has streamlined the procedure for conducting elections and have regulated campaign finance to minimise the role of slush funds in electoral campaign. The new electoral law is a significant development in the light of the controversy that surrounded the old electoral law. The Nigerian Court of Appeal almost declared the enacting process of that law invalid. The new electoral law can become a platform for political advocacy on campaign finance and other electoral issues. The National Assembly has appropriated funds for the 2007 election so as to inoculate the electoral commission from pressures that can compromise its independence. We want to insulate the INEC from interference hence we ensured that its financial powers do not depend on the grace of the executive.

But, I can easily admit that a good electoral law and fiscal provision do not by themselves alone guarantee a free and fair election. The INEC and other institutions of vertical and horizontal accountability must have the political will to execute their mandates in strict compliance with the law. Logistically issues must be addressed, and early warnings of loss of credibility and poor public perception must be addressed quickly and

not wished away. In my view, the major challenge before the INEC is to reassure the public of its competence and credibility. The job of confidence-building is more critical given the history of bungling and fraud associated with electoral bodies in Nigeria. Although, the INEC boss has given assurances of his team's determination to conduct free and fair elections in 2007, scepticism remains rife that the body may not deliver on its promise. There is need for INEC to begin a multi stakeholder dialogue on the 2007 election. This dialogue should include representatives of political parties, especially opposition parties, and civil society groups engaged in electoral advocacy.

The National Assembly under my leadership will be prepared to lead concrete actions to upgrade the capacity and impartiality of the INEC. We intend to conduct periodic oversight and insight reviews of INEC to have a true picture of its preparedness to conduct free and fair polls in 2007. Our commitment is to provide all necessary resources and support to the electoral body because we recognize that it is a Herculean task to conduct free, fair and credible elections in 2007 with all the intersecting crises. Time is short. Problems continue to mount. We must begin to act decisively now.

Let me touch briefly on the role of international community in ensuring free and fair elections in Nigeria in 2007. In my view, we will need international observers and monitors for 2007 election. But, let me express some displeasure at the reactive, rather than proactive, role human rights organizations and the international community have played on elections. It

serves little purpose to monitor elections if we did not monitor the run-up to the elections. Before the votes are cast the issues that compromise an election have existed. In the case of Nigeria, it is important for our foreign friends and development partner to commit more resources and attention to some of the issues that may undermine the credibility of the elections. This is the right time to speak up on the concerns about free, fair and credible elections in Nigeria in 2007. This is time to assure Nigerian leadership of the support of international community to conduct an election that will enable a smooth transition in 2007. Now, is the time to step in and help the electoral commission with technical and financial resources to address some of the logistic problems that bedevil planning for the 2007 elections. I recognize that international community has been forthcoming with critical support. I especially acknowledge the support we have received from the National Democratic Institute for International Development (NDI); the International Republican Institute (IRI), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), IFES, and other institutions. We remain grateful. But, like Oliver Twist, we continue to ask for more.

The 2007 elections in Nigeria hold the key to entrenching democracy in Nigeria. In fact, they hold the key to sustaining democracy in Africa. Nigeria is important as a model of order or disorder in Africa. Nigeria could be a powerful model of true democracy or ugly dictatorship in Nigeria. Nigeria's population and strategic position in Africa guarantees its primacy as a role model. If we engage constructively and deepen democracy in Nigeria we will end up establishing a

service centre for democracy in Africa. The benefit of an Africa where democracy thrives is an immense global public good. We must find the resources and the will to help Nigeria deliver free and fair elections in 2007. This challenge is for everyone: Nigerians and non-Nigerians.

Thank you,

Senator Ken Nnamani
President
Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria