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NIGERIA: Moving Forward



Kingsley Mba Kalu
08033191977



U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry with President-elect Muhammadu Buhari during a meeting in Lagos on January 25 -- photo by Idika Onyukwu

U.S. Congratulates People of Nigeria

Commends President Goodluck Jonathan and President-Elect Muhammadu Buhari

Statement by Secretary Kerry

The United States congratulates the people of Nigeria and the Nigerian Government on historic and largely peaceful elections the weekend of March 28. We especially applaud all voters who showed patience and demonstrated their commitment to participate in the democratic process.

The United States commends Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and its Chairman, Attahiru Jega, on the generally orderly vote, on the use of technology such as card readers to increase the credibility and transparency of the electoral process, and on prompt communication of the results. While

we note reports of logistical problems, such incidents did not undermine the overall outcome of the election.

In January, I traveled personally to Nigeria and met with both President Jonathan and now President-elect Buhari. At that time, I emphasized that for the United States, Nigeria is an increasingly important strategic partner and that Nigeria has a critical role to play in the security and prosperity of this continent and beyond.

I also said that it was imperative that these elections are an improvement

over past elections and that they need to set a new standard for this democracy. That means that Nigerians needed to not only reject violence but actually



promote peace.

We laud both President Jonathan
Continued on page 17



*James F. Entwistle
U.S. Ambassador to Nigeria*

patiently, and enthusiastically in the recent elections, and in doing so you earned the world's respect. Nigeria now serves as a shining democratic example to other African countries preparing for elections.

Elections are about people like you making your voices heard and working together, despite political differences, to keep Nigeria one. As President Obama said to the Nigerian people last month, successful elections and democratic progress will help Nigeria meet the urgent challenges of the coming years. As you do so, you will have no greater friend or partner than the United States.

The United States looks forward

to the inauguration on May 29 and the beginning of a new chapter in our historically close relationship. We are deeply committed to working with you, the Nigerian people, with President-elect Buhari, and with your government for many years to come. ❖

Ambassador James Entwistle



Ambassador Entwistle and USAID Mission Director Michael Harvey joined by their spouses, along with Nigerian performing artist 2Face Idibia, promote the VoteNotFight campaign -- photo by USAID/Nigeria

Dear *Crossroads* Readers, This is an exciting time to be serving as U.S. Ambassador. As Nigerians, you have so much to be proud of. You participated peacefully,

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Moving Forward: *When Nigeria Decides, Nigeria Wins*

It is up to all Nigerians to stay united so that Nigeria can move forward with a clear set of priorities for the future, writes U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Linda Thomas-Greenfield. She adds that Nigeria today serves as an example to other African countries and nations elsewhere in the world preparing for elections. Below is the full text of her opinion editorial.

The world takes notice when Nigerians, citizens of Africa's largest democracy, decide. By participating peacefully and enthusiastically in the recent electoral processes in March and April, millions of you stood strong to re-affirm Nigeria as a leader for democracy in Africa—and around the world. It was an honor for me to lead the U.S. observer mission during the presidential and National Assembly elections. Today, I join the chorus congratulating you and the Independent National Electoral



Assistant Secretary Linda Thomas-Greenfield (center) keenly observes accreditation in Abuja -- photo by Idika Onyukwu

Commission (INEC) on the April 11 vote, which built upon the earlier

successes in March.

Many Nigerians waited for hours, in sun and rain, to cast their ballots and see their votes counted. When I spoke with voters, I was struck not only by their patience, but also by their determination to show Nigeria's dedication to democracy and to democratic principles. Elections are ultimately about people—the volunteers and pollworkers who manage polling stations, the party candidates and supporters who craft policies and political platforms, the civil society activists who work for transparency, the

journalists who report on the campaigns and events on election day, the political leaders who accept victory or concede defeat, especially when stepping down is in the country's best interest. It is about those men and women who shared their stories with me as they stood in line and those members of the security services who remained neutral and vigilantly guarded against fraud and intimidation. Again, we salute you all.

I especially want to reiterate President Obama's accolades for INEC Chairman Attahiru Jega. Under Chairman Jega's steadfast leadership, the staff of INEC succeeded in conducting a generally smooth electoral process and making improvements between March 28 and April 11. We commend INEC for its extensive efforts to increase credibility and transparency in the electoral process, including through the use of technology. Despite some technical glitches, it is clear that technology and use of social media—INEC's online posting of results for each polling unit, live tweeting of results, the use of biometric permanent voter cards and electronic card readers—improved efficiency and limited fraud. I encourage Nigeria and other nations to continue to explore the use of relevant technologies in future elections.

This electoral process, however, was not without violence and irregularities in a number of states. Some individuals worked to undermine the will of the Nigerian people, interfering with electoral processes and resorting to violence and voter intimidation. We regret any loss of life and destruction of property. As Secretary



Members of the traditional council of Nassarawan Gabbas community in Kaduna showing their support for the #Vote Not Fight campaign -- photo USAID/Nigeria

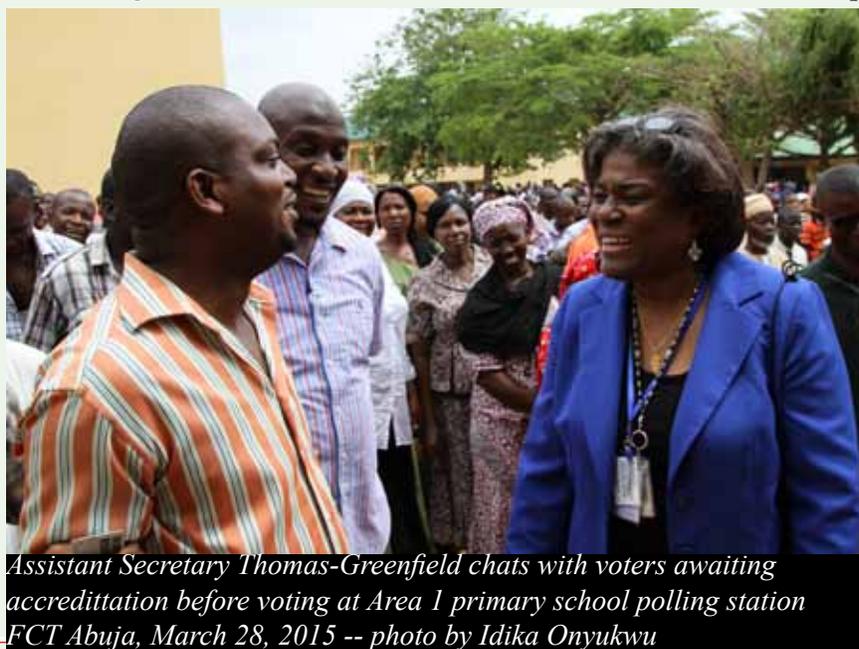
Kerry said when he visited Nigeria in January, violence and rigging have no place in democratic elections. Anyone found to have incited violence or interfered with electoral processes will be unwelcome in the United States and subject to visa sanctions.

When President Obama spoke to you last month, he said successful elections and democratic progress will help Nigeria meet the urgent challenges you face today. Now more than ever, it is up to all Nigerians to stay united so that Nigeria can move forward with a clear set of priorities for the future. We welcome the commitments made by

both President Jonathan and President-Elect Buhari to work closely together in order to ensure a smooth transition to the new government.

This next phase is critical as the world continues its hopeful watch for what happens in Nigeria. Indeed, because you showed up, stood in line, and respected the results of elections even when you may have disagreed with the outcome, Nigeria will serve as an example to other African countries and nations elsewhere in the world preparing for elections. Nigerian democracy will be a beacon across the continent and beyond.

With deep appreciation for the long friendship and partnership between our two great countries, the United States looks forward to the inauguration on May 29 and the beginning of a new chapter in our relationship. We are deeply committed to working with you, the Nigerian people, for many years to come. Nigeria, you made us all proud! ❖



Assistant Secretary Thomas-Greenfield chats with voters awaiting accreditation before voting at Area 1 primary school polling station FCT Abuja, March 28, 2015 -- photo by Idika Onyukwu

Remembering Dr. King



Civil society groups in solidarity at the forum.

heritage of African-Americans and their contributions to U.S. society. He pointed out that were he alive today, January 15, 2015, would have been the 86th birthday of one of America's, and indeed the world's, greatest citizens—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Hawkins also noted Dr. King's role in expanding the democratic space for Americans of African descent. He recommended for viewing the recently released movie on Dr. King, *Selma*, to the audience. The film stars two Nigerian-British actors, David Oyelowo and Carmen Ejogo, who played the roles of Dr. King and Coretta Scott King. Hawkins further advised Nigerians to use the lessons from Dr. King's philosophy of nonviolence during the 2015 election campaigns. He offered the fact that today America's first African-American President was a great lesson traceable to the impact of the civil rights movement and the importance of voting.

The Consul General also made reference to the peace pledges signed by the two major political parties and enjoined all to follow through in practice with the pledges.

Speaking at the occasion, Femi Falana, enjoined civil society groups to be watchdogs and ensure that Nigeria does not go back to the military era. The Senior Advocate of Nigeria urged the leadership of political parties to be more accountable and highlighted several areas he expected the Jonathan administration could have improved its service delivery to Nigerians. A vibrant question and answer session raised issues such as the U.S. stance on same sex marriages; the challenges of governance, and U.S. support to bring back the Chibok girls. ❖

The Center for the Rule of Law (CENTOLAW), in collaboration with the U.S. Consulate General in Lagos, organized a discussion forum on “Non Violent Democratic Change” to mark Black History Month.

The program featured U.S. Consul General Jeffrey Hawkins as the keynote speaker and human rights lawyer Femi Falana (SAN) as special guest. Others who attended the forum included members of

the Committee for the Defense of Human Rights (CDHR), Ogun State Chapter led by Yinka Folarin.

In his opening remarks, the President of CENTOLAW and International Visitors Leadership Program (IVLP) alumnus, Barrister Olasupo Ojo, noted that this was the first time the Rights House in Ikeja was hosting an African-American history month program. Barr. Ojo commended the U.S. government for reaching out to Nigerians through this forum.

The Consul General, in his keynote address, noted that the essence of the program was to celebrate democracy in Nigeria. He said African-American History month celebrates the legacy and

U.S. Consul General Jeffrey Hawkins making remarks.





2015 Elections:

The Build-up to a Free, Fair, Credible, and Peaceful Process

Registered voters wait for accreditation before casting their votes at the Area 1 polling center, FCT Abuja -- photo by Idika Onyukwu

The 2015 general elections have been described by international observers, including the United States and the United Kingdom as peaceful and credible, but very little is known about U.S. government contributions and efforts in making the process free, fair, and peaceful. The U.S. government through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in partnership with the UK Department for International Development (DFID) provided \$68.8 million of assistance to improve performance of election management institutions, promote civic participation and political party development, track election related violence, fund international and domestic election observers, and support electoral security. Below are more details.

Peaceful and credible elections are essential to Nigeria's development. And as the largest economy in sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria's stability is crucial to the security and economic prosperity of its neighbors. The United States seeks to support Nigeria's leaders and its people in their efforts to build a multi-party democracy that addresses the aspirations of all Nigerians. The United States has focused significant diplomatic and programmatic effort to civic and political engagement, conflict management, and improved electoral administration. Our support to electoral processes strengthens

Nigerian efforts to professionalize electoral administration, increase civic participation in electoral matters, address electoral conflict and reduce violence, increase participation of marginalized voters, and provide support to political party development.

The U.S. Government through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has assisted Nigeria with strengthening the elections process since 1999. This includes robust support for the last general elections in 2011 and off-cycle gubernatorial elections in 2012, 2013, and 2014. USAID assistance is co-funded with the UK Department for International

Development (DFID). From 2010 to 2015, USAID in partnership with DFID provided \$68.8 million of assistance to improve performance of election management institutions, promote civic participation and political party development, track election related violence, fund international and domestic election observers, and support electoral security. Working with Nigerian and international partners, we have also engaged diplomatically and publicly to prevent violence and increase accountability, contributing significantly to the goal of free, fair, credible, and peaceful elections in Nigeria. Key lines of effort include:

- Diplomatic Engagement:

The United States has engaged at the highest levels with Nigerian candidates, political party leadership, civil society, business leaders, and other prominent individuals to promote peaceful and credible elections in 2015. Such engagement has taken the form of phone calls, private meetings, and public events in Washington, New York, and on the part of U.S. officials in Nigeria. President Jonathan promised President Obama in September 2013 he would build on Nigeria's democratic progress to make the elections in 2015 free, fair, and peaceful.

Vice President Biden spoke to both candidates earlier in March, stressing the need for a peaceful, free, fair, and inclusive election. Secretary of State Kerry visited Lagos January 25 and met with both President Jonathan and Retired General Buhari, reinforcing the importance of pledging publicly to refrain from violence.

Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Linda Thomas-Greenfield has traveled frequently to Nigeria and led the U.S. delegation to the Bi-National Commission Working Group on elections in February 2014. During a trip in September 2014, she met with returned Mandela Washington Fellowship alumni from President Obama's Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI), inter alia. She will lead our diplomatic elections observation in Abuja.

- **Support to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC):** U.S.-funded projects improve the quality of the elections and the competence of INEC while cultivating public confidence in the process and outcomes. Our support includes technical assistance to improve performance of election management institutions, training of



U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Linda Thomas-Greenfield and Ambassador James Entwistle keenly watch a voter get her voter card read through INEC's card reader machine in Abuja -- photo by Idika Onyukwu

electoral officials and deployment of election materials; institutionalization of election management systems and Election Operation Support Centers (EOSCs); and design of ballots. U.S. support has enabled INEC to implement a nationwide voter education campaign focused on voter registration and participation to ensure all citizens can exercise their right to vote. U.S. contributions also strengthen INEC's capacity to conduct credible elections through better coordinated security planning, a targeted communications strategy, and more effective election dispute resolution mechanisms.

- **Civic and Voter Education:** U.S. support includes funding for the production and dissemination of non-partisan voter education materials and ad campaigns. The Electoral Empowerment of Civil Society Project has launched a get-out-the-vote and non-violence campaign for 2015 endorsed by Nigerian non-partisan celebrities. The project includes an emphasis on youth participation. Working closely with INEC, the Nigerian Emergency Management Agency, and other

relevant bodies, USAID has assisted INEC in its efforts to allow internally displaced persons (IDPs) to vote.

- **Domestic Observers:** The Support for the Electoral Empowerment of Civil Society Project strengthens Nigerians' capacity to observe and report on their own elections. The Project is training and deploying approximately 3,000 domestic observers for the March 2015 presidential election. These observers are trained in how to conduct parallel vote tabulation (PVT) "quick count" to independently measure the quality of election-day processes and official voting results. In addition, a U.S. Mission Nigeria-based elections observation mission will dispatch observation teams throughout Nigeria during the general elections.

- **International Observers:** The United States is supporting National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI) to conduct coordinated international electoral observation missions made up of 42 former elected officials, political and electoral experts, civil

society leaders, academics, and regional experts. These observers will deploy in locations in 16 states plus the Federal Capital Territory. Following the election, delegation members will release preliminary statements, to include findings and recommendations, to the Nigerian public and the international community, followed by more detailed reports at a later date.

- **Elections Security:** The U.S. Government has engaged the Nigerian Government, INEC, and civil society to emphasize the need for a clear and well-coordinated elections security plan, and to offer assistance. A USAID-supported elections security advisor has been deployed to directly support INEC security operations through the Support to Electoral Reforms Project. In addition, a U.S. Department of State elections security expert

visited Nigeria in fall 2014, consulted with Nigerian counterparts in the intervening months, and was embedded into the same project in mid-January to provide targeted security support. This elections security expert will return to Nigeria for Election Day. We are also encouraging Nigerian election and security agencies to demonstrate impartiality and to improve messaging to boost perception of the election's credibility.

- **Media:** Mindful that inaccurate and sensationalist reporting may contribute to post-electoral violence, as in 2011 when an estimated 800 Nigerians were killed over the course of three days, the U.S. Government funds programs to help professionalize the media and strengthen the reporting skills of journalists. This support is designed to help the media's understanding

and accuracy of reporting on elections and electoral processes. The United States has also funded radio programs with political party representatives on topics of voter inclusion and accessibility and has supported training for the media on understanding and reporting on parallel vote tabulation (PVT). The U.S. Mission has conducted intensive outreach throughout the country, resulting in widespread Nigerian press coverage of numerous speeches, round tables, and interviews on the subject of elections, particularly emphasizing the message regarding anti-violence. The Ambassador has called upon all members of the political leadership, Nigerian government, and civil society to publicly eschew violence on many occasions, including direct discussions with the main candidates—President Jonathan and



Voting during the March 28, presidential election at Maitama, FCT Abuja -- photo by Idika Onyukwu

General Buhari.

The Department of State, through the Counter-Terrorism Bureau and the Africa Bureau's Economic Support Fund (ESF), has provided funding to Arewa24, a multi-media platform, centered around a 24/7 free-to-air (FTA) satellite television channel, that creates, produces and distributes programming to the 100,000,000-plus Hausa speakers around the world. Recent Arewa24 programming includes seven original programs on the importance of full citizen participation in nonviolent elections and is intended to build a positive narrative within the Hausa-speaking community, as well as to counter violent extremist narratives.

Meanwhile, senior U.S. officials have leveraged popular media to speak directly to the Nigerian people. The White House on March 23 released a video message from President Obama to the Nigerian people highlighting the opportunity that the upcoming elections present for all Nigerians to stand together in rejecting violence and extremism, and instead show their support for a more peaceful, secure, and prosperous future. Secretary Kerry, together with British Foreign Secretary Hammond, issued the same message in an op-ed that ran in Nigerian papers earlier this month.

- **Political Parties:** The U.S. Government is providing assistance to strengthen Nigeria's political parties in becoming more inclusive and responsive to constituents' needs. We support political parties in their efforts to develop and communicate issue-based platforms taking into account various constituencies, including women, youth, people with disabilities and private sector advocacy coalitions in Nigeria. Our interventions assist parties to participate in candidate debates over radio, women candidate campaign

training and educational fora, party poll agent training, and the promotion of nonviolence messaging into campaigns.

- **Conflict Prevention and Mitigation:** Locally recruited election observers funded by the United States in all 774 local government areas (LGAs) in the 36 states and Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria have gathered data and monitored early warning signs of electoral violence. The ability of communities and local security services to prevent and mitigate conflict, including through early warning and early response mechanisms, will be important during the 2015 elections. At the same time, we are supporting programs in potential hotspot areas to deter elections-related violence by strengthening linkages among diverse Nigerian actors. Strengthening these connections enables these actors to promote constructive participation in the election, defuse political tensions, and strengthen early warning and response mechanisms.

- **Dawn in the Creeks:** U.S. Government entities have partnered on a conflict prevention and mitigation initiative to reduce the risk of destabilizing election-related violence in the Niger Delta. A Nigerian Board of Advisors from the fields of business, civil society, entertainment and religion guide the overarching effort, which includes media, diplomatic and community-level engagement and rapid conflict response in Rivers, Delta and Bayelsa states. The centerpiece of the media effort, reality television show Dawn in the Creeks, illustrates the effects of violence through youths' eyes and highlights options for nonviolent problem solving. The series, now in its second season on eight national networks, aims to spark shifts in perceptions and attitudes towards violence, particularly around elections-related issues. Participatory

radio programming on many local stations complements and broadens the series' reach and impact. Community engagements in twelve conflict-prone Local Government Areas provide youth, community leaders, government officials, and other persons of influence with new approaches designed to address conflict through locally-based solutions. A \$4.2 million grant funds the overall effort.

- **Youth Engagement:** The median age in Nigeria is 18; however, youth participation in elections and governance issues is negligible. Through USAID's Electoral Empowerment of Civil Society Project, we are supporting youth participation in political processes and the promotion of peaceful elections. The U.S. Mission in Nigeria supports a series of political participation conferences in cooperation with youth NGOs such as Youth for Transparency International (YTI). These USG-funded programs target politicians, human rights activists, civil society groups, youth, media and other stakeholders who are committed to social inclusion, bridging the political divide and deepening participatory democracy.

More broadly, 46 Nigerians participated in the 2014 Mandela Washington Fellowship under President Obama's Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI). We continue to partner with these and other Nigerian civil society and youth leaders supporting credible and peaceful elections. Under the Carrington Youth Fellowship Initiative (CYFI), now in its third year of funding, Consulate Lagos provided a \$10,000 grant to mobilize young women to get involved in elections. CYFI pairs Consulate Lagos Officers in their first or second tour together with young Nigerians and mentors them on grant writing and NGO management. CYFI helps U.S. Consulate Lagos leadership remain engaged on youth issues and focused on youth opinions. ❖

Social Media and Elections

*A tremendous change in the Nigerian political process has been the rise of social media. How social media has influenced politics in Nigeria is prominently shown in the way that political parties were unable to change election results in the last presidential election writes **Audu Liberty Oseni**, Program Officer with the Centre for Democracy and Development, Abuja.*

A significant change in the Nigerian political process is the rise of social media. How social media has influenced politics in Nigeria is prominently shown in the way that political parties were unable to change election results as they were coming out of the various polling stations during the 2015 elections. The use of platforms such as Facebook, Blackberry Messenger, WhatsApps, Twitter, Blog, MySpace, YouTube and Instagram have emerged as important means of electioneering and policing of election results. The power of social media played a prominent role during the Ekiti and Osun states gubernatorial elections in 2014. In the Ekiti state election, accredited election and citizen observers, the civil society situation room, the All Progressives Congress (APC), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), and Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) deployed observers to the field who relied mainly on SMS, WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, BBM, and Instagram for the report of incidents. Three hours after voting commenced, observers and citizens had started broadcasting election results announced in their respective voting centres through social media, which then drew the attention of political parties, and local and international observers towards the comprehensive tracking and analyses of these results.

Although INEC constantly advises that genuine election results should not be monitored on social media but through INEC's designated channels, many people, including those of us at the Centre for Democracy and Development situation room knew APC had lost the Ekiti election to the PDP, much before the final tally and announcement of results by INEC. The role of social media in the Ekiti State election equally played out during the Osun state gubernatorial election.

During the March 28 presidential election, social media played a more prominent role not only during the electioneering campaign, but also gave a glimpse of party performances at polling units pending INEC's broadcast of the official election results. Just like in the case of Ekiti and Osun states, a few hours after voting, results started trending on different platforms, giving a clear lead to the All Progressive Congress in the North-East, North-West, South-West, and a struggle with PDP in the North-Central. It also quickly revealed the Peoples Democratic Party's lead in the South-East and South-South. The agitation spawned by the election results on social media subsequently led the PDP to accuse APC of posting fake election results, while charging Nigerians to totally disregard results issued from these platforms and to wait

for INEC's official pronouncement. Indeed, Nigerians waited for the official announcement from INEC. However, there was no major difference between the results announced by INEC and those that had trended on social media.

The use of social media in elections has become a key tool in determining the fate of candidates and parties at polls, and in checkmating electoral fraud. With social media and digital communication increasingly being used for reporting incidents in elections, political parties and the electoral body need to come to terms with the power of citizens in monitoring elections and preventing the alteration of results. To this extent, social media makes it possible for citizens' votes to count. Nigerian democracy and Nigerians have more to gain than to lose in the social media sphere that has taken over ways of communication among people globally.

In summary, the emergence of social media and its utilization in elections has obviously frustrated unscrupulous Nigerian politicians and forestalled the erstwhile strategy of changing election results through the collaboration between returning officers and political parties. This is a revolution to Nigerian democracy. ❖

Editor's Note: This article does not imply U.S. government endorsement, approval or sponsorship.

Voters Should Decide Elections, not the Courts—U.S. Judge Wynn

During an interactive digital video conference at the U.S. Embassy in Abuja and U.S. Consulate General in Lagos, Nigeria's judiciary received a major boost on February 10, when James A. Wynn, Jr., a judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, provided insightful guidance on how judicial officers can handle post-election litigations and issue verdicts that are untainted, free, and fair. Three Federal Capital Territory High Court judges—Justices Ishaq Bello, Peter Affen, and Adebukunola Banjoko—along with government officials, lawyers, law school students, journalists, and civil society representatives actively joined the discussion.

The U.S. Embassy's Counsellor for Public Affairs, Victoria Sloan, explained that the event was a special program on the courts' responsibility to preserve the integrity of the electoral process. She said, "In all democracies, post-election litigation in courts plays a critical role in checking post-election violence."

Sloan added that the interaction was one of the many ways in which the United States is demonstrating a strong commitment to supporting Nigeria's goal of free, fair, credible, and peaceful elections on March 28 and April 11.



Federal Territory Capital High Court Judge, Hon. Justice Ishaq Bello, making his presentation on the judiciary's responsibilities to the electoral process -- photo by Idika Onyukwu

Judge Wynn offered several illustrative examples of how courts in the United States have fared over the years in ensuring that justice is done in all cases relating to election cases. Sharing from his over 24 years of experience on the bench, he noted that in a normal situation, "voters should decide elections and not the courts." Due to various abnormalities, some cases have to be decided by the court. Making comparisons between U.S. and Nigerian law, Judge Wynn explained that a credible electoral process hinges on judicial independence, transparency, consistency, and timeliness of decisions.

Providing a Nigerian perspective to the topic, Justice Ishaq Bello spoke extensively on the Nigerian judicial system as it relates to ensuring a credible electoral process. He said that

the Nigerian judiciary is largely independent, adding that judges involved with election adjudication have worked tirelessly to remain neutral in the electoral processes around the country. Drawing from his 2011 experience as a member of the Election Tribunal in Abuja and Katsina, Judge Bello spoke extensively on the Nigerian legal framework on elections and judicial integrity, and concluded that the newly appointed election tribunal judges are ready to adjudicate cases brought before them after the 2015 elections with judgments that are free, fair, and without fear or favor. ❖



Judge James Wynn

Consular Corner

Editor's Note: Beginning this edition, Consular Corner will be a regular feature in CROSSROADS. In future editions, this space will provide detailed information about consular services in Nigeria. Welcome!

What comes to mind when you hear or read the words “consular affairs?” Many people think of visas—especially tourist and student visas. This is perfectly understandable, since more than 68 million people visited the United States in 2014 and more than 564,000 international students were studying at U.S. colleges and universities in 2013. But did you know that consular officers also reunite families and help create new ones; record the births of newborn children; and assist Americans in times of trouble?

Immigrant visas, as the name suggests, are issued to people who wish to reside permanently in the United States. In most cases, a Lawful Permanent Resident (LPR) or an American citizen relative—for example, a spouse, parent or adult child—starts the immigration process by filing paperwork in the United States. Immigrant visas also include adoptions, refugee and asylum cases, as well as diversity visas. In 2013, the Department of State issued 473,115 immigrant visas—including

We Touch Lives!

51,080 diversity visas and 21,144 employment-based visas—from around the world.

According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, a record 68 million international tourists visited the United States in 2014. We expect the number of potential visitors to the United States could surpass 84 million by 2018. Through the exchange of ideas and the strengthening of business relationships, tourism can benefit the economies of the United States as well as the sending country. In fiscal year 2013, consular officers worldwide issued more than 9.1 million non-immigrant visas, including 545,614 student and 312,514 exchange visitor visas.

The U.S. Department of State has no higher priority than the protection of U.S. citizens overseas. Consular officers around the world provide a variety of services to Americans. If your passport is lost or stolen, we can help you get a new one. If you have been a victim of a serious crime, we can put you in touch with the local authorities. If you become seriously ill or injured while overseas, we can assist in locating appropriate medical services and informing your friends and family in the United States.

Consular officers also play a small role in some of the most important events in a person's life. If your child is born overseas, we can issue a birth certificate and help you apply for your child's first passport. When a U.S. citizen dies while abroad, consular officers are there to assist family and

friends with notifications, disposition of remains, and issuance of the death certificate. Consular officers also help U.S. citizens who are arrested or detained, work closely with local authorities to locate missing Americans, and conduct welfare checks on behalf of family members in the United States.

According to the movies, consular officers can rush into any situation to rescue American citizens in trouble overseas. While Hollywood does exaggerate quite a bit, it is true that we can and do provide assistance to Americans in the event of a crisis. Whether the crisis is a natural disaster, civil unrest or a man-made catastrophe, consular officers are there to provide information on the situation in country, help locate missing Americans, update family and friends back home and, when necessary, evacuate our citizens to safety.

Consular officers around the world strive to provide premier customer service to visa applicants and American citizens who are travelling or residing abroad. Nigeria is no exception. Last year, the U.S. Embassy in Abuja and the U.S. Consulate in Lagos adjudicated more than 220,000 non-immigrant and more than 10,000 immigrant and adoption visa applications. We accepted more than 3,800 passport applications, processed more than 400 birth certificates, and provided assistance in more than 1,100 cases involving American citizens. Consular officers really do touch lives. ❖

Students of Babcock University Learn **CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS BASICS**

On March 3, U. S. Mission Press Attaché Sean McIntosh delivered a crisis communications presentation to over 250 mass communication students of Babcock University in Ogun State.

Dr. Kolade Ajilore, head of the university's mass communication department, lauded the initiative of the U.S. Mission for positively impacting the lives of the students.

Sean's presentation opened the eyes of the students, who sought counsel on how to pursue productive careers in the profession. Apart from taking the audience through a guide to formulating a crisis communication plan, the U.S. Embassy spokesman also touched on practical steps to drafting press releases and conducting press conferences, especially during times of crisis.

Sean emphasized that the display of leadership by elected officials soon after a crisis occurs is a reassuring sign to the public that any crisis can be overcome.

He encouraged the students, many of whom were preparing to graduate, to integrate the use of social media platforms while working in the field as corporate communications professionals.

U.S. Embassy Spokesman Sean J. McIntosh interacts with Babcock University students during a presentation on crisis communications -- photo by Temitayo Famutimi



He hinted that some of the salient points made by Sean during the presentation would be incorporated in the department's new curriculum. ❖

Earth Day Program Sets New Heights for

“Green Ambassadors”

Building resilience in sustainable development and creating green jobs in Nigeria were the highlights of activities to mark this year’s

journalists and other volunteers. Another activity featured a public display of various, innovative green technologies meant for public use. Femi

work together is protecting the environment—the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the land that supports and sustains us. He said



Femi Oye demonstrates how to use bio-fuel gel made from water hyacinth to cook -- photo by Idika Onyukwu

global Earth Day celebration in Abuja. In collaboration with the U.S. Embassy, Herbert H. Humphrey program alumni organized the environmental series from April 1 to 22.

The four-week series started with the creation of Green Ambassadors and Green Champions. This group of environmentally conscious youth vanguards will catalyze a culture of environmental sustainability within major cities for a period of three years. One program included the launching of an Earth Day media forum made up of

Oye of the Carbon Credit Network, demonstrated how the public can use different energy efficient lightings, solar panel, and the use of an energy-efficient cooking stove to the admiration of the public. The closing activity for the 45th Earth Day celebration in Abuja included a green job creation seminar based on simulations from real-time success stories, including practical ways in which green job creation can be achieved.

U.S. Ambassador James Entwistle said that one area the society can and must

environmental challenges like climate change, over fishing, increasing acidity of our oceans, and air pollution do not respect international borders.

Ambassador Entwistle furthermore expressed the U.S. government’s commitment to environmental protection, including its commitment here in Nigeria.

“This building in which we are meeting, completed last November, meets the international standard as a LEED certified gold building,” he said.

“The entire Embassy compound takes advantage of the very latest in energy efficient, environmentally friendly technology. For instance, power for this building is supplemented by a solar array on the roof that will provide 412 megawatt-hours per year, enough to light nearly three thousand light bulbs for eight hours a day, every day of the year. We can attest that environmentally friendly technologies are economically friendly as well. This solar power system will ultimately save us more than 20 million naira per year in electricity charges.”

He added that the U.S. government energy efficient wood stove project is helping Ebonyi and Niger states transition from gas to



Biofuel gel made from water hyacinth and a locally produced cooking stove.

clean energy fuels. The stoves are produced and sold locally, creating

jobs for artisans and marketers. ❖

\$10,000 Reward for Information on Fake Anti-Malaria Drugs

The United States government, through the U.S. President’s Malaria Initiative (PMI) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), has launched the “Make a Difference” hotline and reward program that offers up to \$10,000 (approximately two million naira) for information concerning the illegal distribution of stolen and falsified anti-malaria medication in Nigeria. The announcement came as the world health community marked World Malaria Day and World Intellectual Property Day on April 24.

The U.S. Ambassador to Nigeria, James F. Entwistle, said, “Despite so many gains in malaria prevention and treatment, the widespread prevalence

of counterfeit, substandard medicines is contributing to the alarmingly high number of malaria deaths and costs of health care in Nigeria.”

The “Make a Difference” program will inform the public about the



dangers of using falsified and stolen medications, including how to avoid such medicines. Nigerians can make a difference in their community by reporting individuals involved in the manufacturing, distribution, or sale of these illicit and dangerous products. USAID’s Office of the Inspector General is offering rewards for information concerning theft of anti-malaria drugs.

Individuals with information on these networks should call the toll-free hotline at **0708-060-1816** or send an email to MADMalariaHotline@usaid.gov. All information will be kept confidential. Please note that if you wish to be considered for a reward, you will need to provide identifying information. ❖

U.S. Congratulates Nigeria

--Continued from page 2

and General Buhari for their public commitments to the Abuja Accord signed in January and reaffirmed March 26, respecting the official results, and encouraging their supporters to do the same. We commend President Jonathan for his years of service and for having acted in the best interest of his country. We welcome President Jonathan's calls for unity and calm during this transition period.

Finally, we extend our congratulations to President-elect Buhari. The United States reiterates its commitment to working with the newly elected government that emerges from this democratic process. ❖



PHOTOS: Top, Ambassador Entwistle receives a souvenir from INEC Chairman Prof. Jega during a visit on January 20, 2014 -- photo by Idika Onyukwu.) Bottom: Ambassador Entwistle congratulates President-elect Mohammedu Buhari. Right to left are, U.S. Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, Althea Cawley-Murphree and Andrea Tomaszewicz -- photo by Sunday Aghaeze, ThisDay newspaper).



U.S. and Nigerian military forces take part in a visit, board, search, and seizure drill aboard the Military Sealift Command's joint high-speed vessel USNS as part of Obangame Express 2015, March 22. -- photo by U.S. Navy 2nd Class Kenan O'Conno

U.S., Nigeria, Others in Joint Maritime Exercise

Twenty three nations, including Nigeria, actively participated in the 2015 Obangame Express—a multinational maritime exercise sponsored by the U.S. Africa Command.

The purpose of the exercise was to test multinational maritime forces in a broad range of naval operations in order to increase capability and capacity, as a collective whole, for Gulf of Guinea nations to deter piracy, illicit trafficking, and other maritime threats.

The exercise began on March 19, 2015, and took place throughout the Gulf of Guinea, and in land-based maritime operations centers throughout the region. Major centers of international activity will be in the vicinity of Accra, Ghana.

Speaking during the telephonic

media briefing coordinated by the Africa Regional Media Hub of the U.S. Department of State in Johannesburg, South Africa, the Officer in Tactical Command of Exercise Obangame Express 2015, U.S. Navy Captain John Rinko, stated that Nigeria deployed naval forces and resources for the exercise.

“Their nation (Nigeria) has three offshore patrol vessels, a patrol craft, one maritime patrol aircraft, four boarding teams, and two special operating forces boarding teams that are engaged in the exercise.

“So their nation (Nigeria) has clearly indicated the importance of this exercise to their nation and the importance of maritime security in their waters.

“It’s only suffice to say that we are encouraged by their significant

continued support to this exercise series as we all recognize the importance of the Nigerian efforts in maintaining maritime security in the region,” Rinko said.

According to Captain Rinko, the Obangame Express 2015 marks the fifth year of execution of the exercise, in which participation has more than quadrupled since its inception in 2010.

“The level of participation is indicative of the global importance of this region and the desires of the United States and our African, European, and South American partners to continue to improve regional cooperation in the Gulf of Guinea. Every nation participating plays a critical role in their own nations maritime security, as well as the security in the entire region,” he added.

The participating countries included Angola, Belgium, Benin, Brazil, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Denmark, Equatorial Guinea, France, Gabon, Germany, Ghana, Nigeria, Norway, Portugal, Republic of Congo, Sao Tome & Principe, Spain, Togo, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States, as well as the Economic Community of West African States and the Economic Community of Central African States. ❖



Ghana (March 18, 2015) Members of a Ghanaian navy boarding team evaluate a simulated casualty in a medical training exercise during Obangame Express 2015 -- photo by U.S. Navy Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Luis R. Chavez, Jr.

Ghanaian Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Geoffrey Mawuli Biekro, speaks at the Obangame Express 2015 opening ceremony, March 19, 2015



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Oregon Law School Connects EducationUSA Abuja

On Thursday, April 16, 2015, *EducationUSA* Abuja hosted a webinar to connect University of Oregon Law School

and Nigerian Law graduates interested in pursuing their LLM in the U.S. More than 52 Lawyers from the Nigerian Law School, International Federation of Women Lawyers, and Global Association of Female Attorneys participated in the event at the U.S. Embassy Abuja. ❖

The resources highlighted below are available at the Information Resource Centers in Abuja and Lagos. To Register as a member, please visit: <http://tinyurl.com/ircregistration>, and for all enquiries, please write to: ircabuja@state.gov (North) and wylagos@state.gov (South).



President Barack Obama places an order with the waitress during a lunch with U.S. Senator

Barbara Mikulski, Amanda Rothschild, Mary Stein and Morvika "Vika" Jordan to discuss balancing family and jobs, at Charmington's Café in North Baltimore, Maryland, January 15, 2015. (Official White House photo by Pete Souza)

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Statement of President Barack Obama Commemorating International Women's Day
March 8, 2015

As half the planet, women make immeasurable contributions to our world. They are entrepreneurs, farmers, educators, scientists, artists, soldiers, mothers, heads of state – the list is endless... <http://1.usa.gov/1E6ozjJ>



Michelle Obama: Let's Ensure Every Girl Can Learn

"We cannot address the issue of girls' education unless we are also willing to confront the complex issues that keep so many girls out of school," First Lady Michelle Obama said.
[Http://1.usa.gov/1HqTjgy](http://1.usa.gov/1HqTjgy)

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