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PRESS RELEASE

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When Nigeria Decides, Nigeria Wins

By: U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs
Linda Thomas-Greenfield



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 last month. Today, I join the chorus congratulating you and the Independent National Electoral 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 poll workers 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 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!

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Biography

Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield, a member of the Career Foreign Service, was sworn in on August 6, 2013 as the Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of African Affairs. In this capacity, she leads the bureau in the Department of State focused on the development and management of U.S. policy toward sub-Saharan Africa. Prior to this appointment, she served as Director General of the Foreign Service and Director of Human Resources (2012-2013), leading a team of approximately 400 employees who handled the full range of personnel functions for the State Department's 70,000-strong workforce -- from recruitment and hiring, to evaluations, promotions and retirement.

Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield's 32-year Foreign Service career includes an ambassadorship to Liberia (2008-2012), and foreign postings in Switzerland (at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations), Pakistan, Kenya, The Gambia, Nigeria, and Jamaica. In addition to the Bureau of Human Resources, her Washington postings include the Bureau of African Affairs (2006-2008) where she served as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, and the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (2004-2006) where she served as Deputy Assistant Secretary.

Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield was the 2000 recipient of the Warren Christopher Award for Outstanding Achievement in Global Affairs in recognition of her work with refugees. She has received several Superior, Meritorious, and Performance awards, including the Presidential Meritorious Service Award. She was a 2010 inductee into the Louisiana State University Alumni Association Hall of Distinction.

Prior to joining the Department of State, Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield taught Political Science at Bucknell University in Pennsylvania. She earned a bachelor's degree from Louisiana State University and a master's degree from the University of Wisconsin, where she also did work towards a doctorate.

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