

TEXT OF PRESS BRIEFING BY THE CMG ON THURSDAY FEBRUARY 15TH 2007 AT DAYSPRING HOTEL, WUSE ZONE 6, ABUJA, FCT, NIGERIA

Ladies and gentlemen of the Press,

We appreciate your presence at this press conference called by the Consultative Media Group (CMG) to intimate you with its activities during this crucial electioneering period and beyond.

The CMG is a product of the desire by Nigerian media stakeholders to expand and strengthen the scope of freedom of expression and the press, access to information, public accountability and media responsibility. It is in essence a voluntary alliance of stakeholders with a shared purpose of enhancing access, participation and accountability to the public interest in a democratic society.

The CMG has been constituted as an alliance of media professional and support organizations; its membership is currently derived from the Newspaper Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN) Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE), the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Nigeria Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ), Media Rights Agenda (MRA) and the International Press Centre (IPC).

The major vision of the CMG is to create a fair, informative, equitable and accountable media while sustaining participatory democracy in the country. Pursuant to this vision, members of the CMG are collectively striving to:

- Reinforce the media's commitment to democracy through enhancing standards for informative, equitable, and accessible coverage during elections

- Strengthen performance in election coverage through; sharing, amplifying, and recognizing good practices across the media
- Promote ownership of the media's critical role in the democratic process through peer monitoring and accountability to the public on compliance with standards for informative, equitable and inclusive election coverage.
- Improve the institutional environment for the media's election coverage through public policy engagement and advocacy

MAJOR ACTIVITIES

In order to realize its set objectives, the CMG has within the short period of its existence embarked on a number of activities, some of which we expect to immediately impact on the forthcoming elections. Others will, hopefully, contribute to the longer process of sustaining democratic values and institutions.

Guidelines for Media Coverage during Elections

There is a common public desire for a free, fair, credible and well regulated election and the avoidance of the aggravation of tension and violence as well as unnecessary political discord. To ensure that the environment that can facilitate this is brought about, the CMG has produced a set of *Guidelines for Media Coverage during Elections*. Highlights of the objectives include promoting the principle of fair and balanced reporting, providing equal space and time to all sides, truthful and accurate account of events, developing the capacity of media professionals and offering forum for exchange of public comments and criticisms in balanced and reasonable manner.

The guidelines, which we are making public at this press conference, essentially dwell on the fact that the media needs to abide with the code of ethics and conduct of the journalism profession in performing its election coverage duties and

responsibilities. They are also to draw media attention to the imperative of abiding with relevant codes and acts such as the Electoral Act 2006 and the Nigeria Broadcasting Code.

The documents referred to above also provide the framework for media partnership with the civil society, media obligation to women and the disadvantaged groups, media self-regulation and the avoidance of news that are capable of inciting violence and stereotyping on the basis of gender, ethnicity, physical disability etc.

Media Monitoring Guidelines

Further to the goal of ensuring credible electoral reports, the CMG has also produced a Matrix for Monitoring Media Coverage. The core points in the guidelines are:

- Direct and Equal Access to Media Services
- Conduct on polling day
- Duty to inform the public
- Duty to cater for the information needs of the rural population
- Duty of balance and impartiality
- Duty of political neutrality
- Duty to maintain gender-balanced coverage, and
- Duty to provide special education and information programs

Awards

As a demonstration of its commitment to the promotion of credible media coverage of the elections in general and special interest groups in particular, the CMG is concluding the processes of institutionalizing awards that are designed to facilitate the process. The awards will recognize and reward best practices in media coverage of the electoral process and will cover the print and broadcast reports between July 1, 2006 and May 31, 2007.

General

In general the CMG is working towards ensuring a level playing field for political parties and candidates with regard to access to the media on the basis of existing legal standards and requirements. It will therefore intervene from time to time in cases of unjustifiable denial of access to the media for any political party or candidate. Since the CMG has as members, professional bodies and associations within the media, it will also encourage aggrieved political parties and candidates to send complaints to it. The media professional bodies are expected to deal with such complaints against their members.

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