Editors call for Electoral Reforms, 50% Presidential Threshold, Timely Election Dispute Resolution

The Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE) has called for far-reaching constitutional and electoral reforms to strengthen Nigeria's democracy, including the introduction of a 50 per cent threshold for presidential elections and the resolution of electoral disputes before the swearing-in of declared winners. The Guild also called for reforms to the process of appointing the Chairman, National Commissioners and Resident Electoral Commissioners of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), as well as State Electoral Commissioners. The resolutions were contained in the communiqué issued at the end of the 22nd All Nigeria Editors Conference (ANEC 2026), held in Enugu from September 24 to 26, 2026 and signed by Eze Anaba and Onuoha Ukeh, President and General Secretary respectively. The conference, which had the theme, "The Ballot, the Media and the Task of Keeping Democracy Alive," was chaired by the Obi of Onitsha, His Royal Majesty Igwe Nnaemeka Alfred Achebe, while the Archbishop Emeritus of Abuja, His Eminence John Cardinal Onaiyekan, delivered the keynote address. The Vice President, Senator Kashim Shettima, participated virtually as Special Guest of Honour, while the Enugu State Governor, Dr Peter Ndubuisi Mbah, was the Chief Host. More than 500 editors, publishers and senior media practitioners from print, broadcast and digital platforms, as well as political, traditional, religious, academic, regulatory and development-sector leaders, attended the conference. The Guild said the conference examined the challenges confronting Nigeria's electoral democracy, particularly the threats posed by artificial intelligence, misinformation, disinformation, electoral insecurity and declining public confidence in the electoral process ahead of the 2027 general elections.

According to the communiqué, the Guild observed that while the ballot remained the principal instrument through which citizens exercise their sovereign will, its value depended on credible information, public confidence in the electoral process and the assurance that votes would be properly counted and respected. It identified voter apathy as a product of several factors, including poor governance, electoral violence and intimidation, administrative shortcomings, declining public confidence and concerns over the relationship between electoral outcomes and subsequent judicial decisions. The editors expressed concern that judicial interventions in some electoral disputes had created perceptions in sections of the public that court decisions could displace outcomes recorded at the ballot box.

The Guild, however, stressed the need to respect judicial independence, while calling for electoral adjudication that is timely, transparent, predictable and impartial, with genuine electoral irregularities appropriately addressed. The editors further called for the resolution of electoral disputes within appropriate timelines and preferably before the swearing-in of declared winners. They also recommended consideration of an appropriate

constitutional threshold for presidential elections and provision for a run-off where the candidate with the highest number of votes fails to secure up to 50 per cent of the votes cast. The Guild also called for a review of the limitations placed on ordinary voters seeking to challenge electoral results and advocated a constitutional framework that would permit independent candidacy. The conference identified generative artificial intelligence, deepfakes, voice cloning and automated networks as major emerging threats to the integrity of electoral information. It warned that synthetic content could be produced and distributed rapidly, including fabricated election results, cloned voices of public officials, forged documents, manipulated result sheets and fake reports attributed to established media organizations. The editors said the greatest danger was not merely the circulation of individual falsehoods but the broader erosion of public trust when citizens became unable to distinguish authentic information from fabricated content. The Guild therefore urged newsrooms to institutionalize fact-checking and verification systems and integrate digital verification, deepfake detection and forensic tools into their editorial workflows. It also reaffirmed the Nigerian Media Code of Election Coverage (Revised 2022), jointly endorsed by the Newspaper Proprietors' Association of Nigeria, Broadcasting Organizations of Nigeria, Nigeria Union of Journalists, Nigerian Guild of Editors, Radio, Television, Theatre and Arts Workers Union and Guild of Corporate Online Publishers. The Guild urged all news organizations to adopt the Code and train their journalists and other editorial staff on its provisions ahead of the 2027 elections. The NGE reaffirmed the responsibility of the media to provide accurate, verified and independent information and to scrutinize governments, political parties and other centres of power. It, however, stressed that media scrutiny should not amount to suppressing legitimate achievements. The Guild called for evidence-based journalism that neither exaggerates failures nor suppresses verified achievements and developments. It also clarified that editorial neutrality meant impartiality among legitimate political contenders and did not require journalists to remain silent in the face of verified wrongdoing or create false equivalence between established facts and unverified claims. The conference further urged governments at all levels to remain transparent and accountable and to cooperate with the media in the legitimate exercise of its watchdog role, including the scrutiny of public programmes and expenditure.

It called on government and political actors to guarantee equitable access to media space for both government and opposition voices while respecting editorial independence. The Guild declared that election security must include the safety and protection of journalists covering elections. It warned that the electoral process could not be fully transparent where journalists were threatened, attacked, obstructed or prevented from independently observing and reporting events. It therefore called on security agencies and political actors to protect journalists and ensure that they could perform their constitutional and professional responsibilities without intimidation. The NGE also urged INEC to sustain nationwide readiness assessments, strengthen technical partnerships for cybersecurity and electoral technology, ensure the technical integrity of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and protect the institutional independence of the electoral commission. It stressed that all technology deployed in elections must remain subject to human oversight, transparency, accountability and legal verification. The editors also addressed the challenge of reporting terrorism, acknowledging the difficult balance between the public's right to know about terrorist attacks and the danger that irresponsible reporting could inadvertently amplify terrorist propaganda, aid recruitment, compromise security operations or traumatize victims. The conference consequently endorsed the principle: “Inform, Don't Amplify.” It urged newsrooms to identify terrorist claims clearly as claims until independently verified and to avoid reproducing propaganda, recruitment messages, slogans or graphic material except where there was compelling editorial justification. The Guild resolved that acts of terrorism should be reported responsibly and accurately without giving undue publicity or oxygen to terrorist organizations or inadvertently encouraging further acts of violence. The conference reaffirmed that the media should remain “pro-Nigeria, pro-Ballot and pro-People”, rather than align itself with any political party. It stressed that the credibility of Nigeria's democracy ultimately depended on an electoral process in which citizens could make informed choices, cast their votes freely and have confidence that their votes would be accurately counted and respected.

Among the major papers presented at the conference were those by former Nigerian Bar Association President, Mazi Afam Osigwe, SAN, on “Election Petitions in the Digital Age: Independence, Evidence, BVAS and the Courts”; Professor Auwalu H. Yadudu of Bayero University, Kano, on “Public Trust, Electoral Justice and Democratic Stability”; and former Managing Director/Editor-in-Chief of The Guardian Newspapers, Mr Martin Oloja, on “Terrorism Without Becoming a Tool for Terrorists.”

Others were papers by Professor Chinyere Stella Okunna of Paul University, Awka, on “Election Security in Democratic Governance”; Professor Farooq A. Kperogi of Kennesaw State University, Georgia, USA, on “When Lies Look Real: Detecting and Debunking AI Disinformation Before, During and After Election”; and Dr Richard Okoye, Founder/Chief Medical Director of Save a Life Hospital, on “Managing Stress, Deadlines and Personal Wellbeing.” The Guild expressed profound appreciation to the Government and people of Enugu State for their hospitality and support, as well as speakers, presenters, panelists, sponsors and development partners whose contributions enriched the conference.