

# COMMUNIQUE

## HIGH-LEVEL ROUNDTABLE ON SECURITY AGENCIES AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN NIGERIA

Transcorp Hilton Abuja

Thursday, 13th March 2025



### 1. Preamble

The Goodluck Jonathan Foundation (GJF) convened a High-Level Roundtable on Security Agencies and Civic Engagement in Nigeria on 13th March 2025 at Transcorp Hilton, Abuja. The roundtable brought together the leadership of security agencies, and civil society organizations to explore avenues for improved trust-building and collaboration.

### 2. Key Observations & Challenges Identified

Participants noted the following key issues affecting national security governance in Nigeria:

#### i. Trust Deficit Between Security Agencies and Citizens

- Concerns were raised about arbitrary arrests, prolonged detentions without trial, and heavy-handed responses to protests, which have deepened public distrust in law enforcement.
- Perceptions of impunity and lack of accountability among security forces weakened citizen confidence in state institutions.

#### ii. Undue Political Interference in Security Operations

- The discussion highlighted how political actors often manipulate security agencies for personal or partisan interests, weakening professionalism and undermining public trust.
- The zero-sum nature of Nigerian politics, where elections are seen as a battle for total control rather than a democratic process, has led to the use and enabling of political thugs during elections and governance and the shielding of politically connected individuals from prosecution, further weakening the rule of law.
- The deployment of security forces based on political interests rather than national security imperatives.

#### iii. The Urgent Need for Improved Data and Identity Management

- A lack of centralized and reliable identity management systems has contributed to challenges in tracking security threats and enforcing laws effectively.
- The inconsistencies and duplication in national identity databases hinder intelligence-sharing among security agencies.
- Weak data management has affected law enforcement operations, criminal investigations, and national security coordination.

#### **iv. Weak National Identity and Rising Ethno-Religious Divisions**

- There is a low sense of nationalism, as many Nigerians identify more strongly with ethnic and religious identities than with the nation-state.
- These divisions influence security sector recruitment, deployment, and operational decisions, sometimes leading to perceptions of bias in law enforcement.
- Participants emphasized the need to build a stronger national consciousness that prioritizes service delivery, inclusion, patriotism, unity, and collective responsibility over ethnic and religious affiliations.

#### **v. Security Sector Reforms and Personnel Welfare**

- Nigeria's current state-centric security model prioritizes the protection of government institutions and elites over the security needs of citizens and communities.
- The militarization of civil policing and excessive use of force against protesters and civic activists have further alienated security agencies from the people they are meant to serve.
- Mid-level security officers (police, military, DSS, NSCDC, etc.) are often at the frontline of security-civilian interactions and require enhanced training in community policing, human rights compliance, crisis communication, and conflict resolution.
- There is limited exposure to best practices in security governance, engagement with civil society, and strategic de-escalation techniques among middle-ranking officers.
- Participants emphasized the need for better welfare, training, and operational resources for security personnel to enhance professionalism and effectiveness.
- Calls were made for the establishment of an independent and private-led National Fund to improve service delivery.

#### **vi. The Role of Youth and Social Media in Security Governance**

- Young Nigerians form the largest demographic group and are the highest users and consumers of digital media, making them key stakeholders in security discussions.
- The proliferation of misinformation and disinformation on social media has influenced negative perceptions of security agencies, highlighting the need for strategic communication and digital engagement to bridge the trust gap.

#### **vii. The Need for Institutionalized Engagement & Policy Reforms**

- Weak coordination and cooperation between government, security agencies, and local communities have hindered effective security responses.
- Legislative reforms are needed to enhance accountability mechanisms and citizen engagement in security governance.
- The ongoing constitution review on local government autonomy or reform should be expanded to include the involvement of local governments and traditional institutions in community-based security initiatives to foster peace and stability.

### 3. Key Resolutions & Recommendations

To address these challenges, the following key resolutions were agreed upon:

#### **i. Institutionalizing Regular Security-Citizen Engagement:**

- Organise regular regionalised town hall meetings and open dialogues between security agencies and communities to foster trust.
- Strengthen youth engagement platforms to facilitate intergenerational dialogue between young people and security leadership.

#### **ii. Strengthening Political Accountability & Depoliticizing Security Agencies**

- Security agencies must be insulated from political manipulation to ensure professionalism, neutrality, and public trust.
- The use of political thugs in elections and governance must be criminalized and strictly prosecuted.
- There should be strict enforcement of accountability mechanisms to prevent political actors from abusing security agencies for personal or partisan gains.

#### **iii. Promoting National Identity and Unity in Security Governance**

- National unity should be actively promoted through civic education, media campaigns, and governance reforms.
- Security sector recruitment and deployment must be based on professionalism and merit rather than ethnic or religious affiliations.
- There should be programs to foster patriotism among youth, encouraging them to see security as a collective responsibility.

#### **iv. Legislative and Policy Reforms:**

- Engage lawmakers and policymakers to review security laws and drive reforms that promote citizen rights, transparency, and professional policing.
- Strengthen oversight mechanisms for security institutions to ensure accountability and adherence to human rights standards.

#### **v. Improving Strategic Communication & Countering Misinformation:**

- Security agencies should improve their crisis communication mechanisms with a regular briefing of journalists and leverage social media and youth influencers to promote transparency, correct misinformation, and highlight positive security efforts.
- Media practitioners and security agencies should collaborate on strategic communication training to improve reportage on security matters.

#### **vi. Security Sector Reforms & Improved Welfare for Security Personnel:**

- A shift towards a citizen-centric security model is essential to ensure that law enforcement operates transparently, humanely, and in partnership with communities.
- Advocate for the review of funding and resource allocation to the Nigerian Police Force and other security agencies.
- Establish an independent and private sector-managed National Fund to support the welfare, training, and equipment needs of security personnel.

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#### **vii. Institutionalizing Security-Citizen Engagement & Capacity Building for Mid-Level Officers**

- Develop continuous professional development programs for middle-cadre officers, focusing on human rights, community policing, and non-violent conflict resolution.
- Integrate civic engagement modules into security training schools and academies.

#### **viii. Strengthening Local Security Governance & Community-Based Approaches:**

- Integrate security considerations into local governance structures, with a stronger role for traditional leaders and grassroots organizations.
- Activate the Victim Support Fund as provided for under section 91 of the Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act of 2022 to assist individuals and communities affected by security challenges, thereby rebuilding trust.

#### **ix. Strengthening Data and Identity Management for National Security**

- Improve national biometric registration and data harmonisation to ensure comprehensive and accessible identity records for security operations.
- Enhance inter-agency collaboration on identity management to prevent duplication and inefficiencies.

#### **4. Next Steps & Commitment to Implementation**

Participants unanimously agreed on the importance of sustaining this dialogue beyond the roundtable. Hence, the Foundation will:

- i. Work with stakeholders, including security agencies, policymakers, civil society, and development partners, to implement key resolutions.
- ii. Convene follow-up engagements at the sub-regional level to step down the conversations and strengthen multi-stakeholder collaboration in security governance.

The Goodluck Jonathan Foundation remains committed to advancing peace, democracy, and good governance in Nigeria and across Africa.

**Signed:**

**Ann Iyonu mpi**

*Executive Director*

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