

PRESS STATEMENT
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 5, 2026

A Coalition of Faith Based and Civil Society Organizations Calls for Urgent Reforms to Advance Women's Empowerment and Political Leadership Inclusion in Nigeria

Despite comprising half of Nigeria's population, women are grossly underrepresented in governance at the national, state and local levels. This imbalance impacts diverse perspectives of the national agenda and hampers the nation's capacity to achieve equitable and sustainable development.

A combination of factors in the structural, cultural, social, economic, and political spheres coalesce to reinforce one another, and place major obstacles women representation in governance, and make it difficult for the few who are in politics to succeed or remain in leadership roles without "godfathers." Women aspirants to political office, more than their male counterparts are often subjected to violence, harassment, and intimidation, which not only deter their participation but pose serious threats to their safety during campaigns.

We – the **Africa Faith and Justice Network** (afjn.org), **Dominicans for Justice and Peace** at the United Nations (un.op.org), **Africa Faith and Justice Network Nigeria** (afjn.org.ng), and a coalition of Catholic Reverend Sisters and Civil Society partners from across Nigeria – call for reform of political party structures, enforcement of policies and practices that empower women, strengthen inclusive democratic governance, and enforce laws that penalize electoral violence and harassment.

Inclusive leadership is not just about achieving gender balance; it is a strategic necessity to making policies that are more comprehensive and embrace the common good. When women are an integral part of the decision-making in political processes, policies are more humane and more embracing of the common good; communities become more resilient, governance more effective in addressing the needs at the grassroots and promoting sustainable development that drives the common good of the nation.

Countries that enforce legislation to guarantee women's participation in politics do achieve their stated goals in single or lower houses. This is evident in Rwanda (64%), Cuba (56%), Nicaragua (55%), Andorra (50 %), Mexico (50%), and the United Arab Emirates (50%). Nigeria, despite her claims, has a dismal 4% of women participation at the same level and ranks 178th of 182 countries studied. Think of that for a moment and let it sink in.

In 2006, Nigeria adopted a "National Gender Policy" to ensure at least 35% of women representation in public offices but has failed woefully to enshrine it into law and enforce it. It is not enough for Nigeria to talk about gender balance in leadership, a comprehensive legislation accompanied by a transformation of the social, cultural and political

environments; enacting policies and enshrining them into laws that enforce inclusive governance and address the financial requirements for aspiring women candidates are indispensable to achieve inclusive leadership.

Such transformation will not only align Nigeria with her general commitment to promote democracy; it responds to international development frameworks which Nigeria has officially endorsed. More importantly, by proactively investing in empowering women to participate fully in governance, Nigeria stands to gain from a wealth of talents and innovation that positions the nation for sustainable national development.

We therefore call on Nigeria's political leadership at the national, state, and local government levels to proactively ensure

- Inclusive and representative leadership that moves beyond rhetoric toward **intentional, structured, and enforceable actions** that guarantee meaningful participation and long-term success.
- Reforms in political party structures to improve access for women candidates
- Stronger legislation and enforcement mechanisms supporting inclusive governance
- Just policies that address the financial constraints faced by women aspirants
- Enforcement of laws that penalize electoral violence and harassment, particularly against women
- Strategic media engagement to promote the developmental benefits of women's political participation

We call on all Nigerians at all levels of governance; national, state and local to proactively invest in women's leadership, so Nigeria can unlock a larger pool of talent, innovation, and perspectives essential for sustainable national development and the common good.

CONTACTS

Sr. Eucharia Madueke, SNDdeN - AFJN Washington Coordinator of Women Empowerment

+1 202 459 1430 (WhatsApp); email: eucharia@afjn.org

Rev. Aniedi Okure, OP – Permanent Delegate of the Dominicans to the United Nations

+41 77 213 51 53 (WhatsApp) email: delegate@un.op.org

Sr. Bernadette Eyewan Okure, SHCJ – AFJN Nigeria National Coordinator

+234 703 673 5895; email: bokure@shcj.org

Sr. Fidelia Maria Alao, EHJ – AFJN Nigeria National Secretary

+234 806 312 9667; email: alaofidelia2016@gmail.com