New Governor in Bayelsa

Contributed by Godfrey Azubike
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Seriake Dickson, former member of the House of Representatives takes charge as Bayelsa State governor

Henry Seriake Dickson of the People’s Democratic Parry, PDP, who emerged victorious in the Bayelsa State governorship election held on February 11, was last week formally sworn in as the new chief executive of the state. He took the oath of office along with Rear Admiral John Jonah, his deputy last Tuesday, February 14. The swearing in ceremony was conducted by Kate Abari, the state chief judge, at the Peace Park in Yenagoa. In his speech, Dickson promised not to let Bayelsans and the Ijaw nation down. He also declared free and compulsory education at both primary and secondary school levels in the state. He explained that his mandate symbolised the change which the people asked for and since they voted for restoration they had voted for the change they rightly deserved. He said the state would never remain the same. According to him, in the course of his campaigns, he promised among others, free and compulsory education for primary and secondary schools; investment in human capital and transparent and accountable government that places the welfare of the people above all other things “These are not mere campaign promises. They will form the cornerstone of our administration,” he said. Dickson extended a hand of friendship to all those who vied for the election, saying that there was no victor and no vanquished. “Bayelsa State and the Ijaw nation are the ultimate winners. We urge them all to join hands with us to build Bayelsa State and the Ijaw nation. Let us all unite to build a state that we will bequeath to our children and generations yet unborn.” He urged all Bayelsans to join hands in the struggle to restore the state to an enviable State. Dickson of the PDP polled 417, 500 to defeat the other candidates in the election. Imoro Kubor of Change Advocate Party, CAP, came a distant second, with 22,534 votes; Kemela Okara of Action Congress of Nigeria, ACN, came third with 9,627 votes; while Famous Daunemigha of Congress for Progressive Change, CPC, polled 3,548 to place fourth in the election. The rest 32 contestants recorded insignificant votes in the poll. The PDP also recorded more than 25 percent of the votes cast in all the local government areas of the state. Joseph Ajienka, the vice chancellor of University of Port Harcourt who was the returning officer, announced the result Sunday, February 12, at the Independent National Electoral Commission’s, INEC, office in Yenagoa. Though the turnout of voters was low, the election was relatively free and fair. But the opposition said the polls were massively rigged. Okara, the ACN candidate, claimed that going by the reports from his agents across the state, there were serious cases of multiple thumb printing and suppression of their members and agents across the state. He also alleged that voters were induced with money by the PDP at some polling booths. “If we lost in a free and fair contest we would gladly accept it; but when there are infringements on the democratic process, we cannot accept it,” he said. The election and swearing-in brought to an end, the battle over who occupies the Creek Haven Government House in Yenagoa, following the recent Supreme Court judgement which brought the tenure of Timipre Sylva, immediate past governor of the state to an abrupt end. The last attempt to halt the election was on Friday, February 10, when it was alleged that a Federal High Court, Abuja, presided over by Justice Donatus Okorowo had granted an exparte application to stop the election. The court was said to have summoned INEC to explain why it should not stop the election. But Okorowo said he never summoned INEC to stop the election. “This court made no order to stop the election. This court made no order as regards restraining all the processes leading to the election,” the judge said.