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FG REAFFIRMS ITS COMMITMENT TO PROVIDE ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION IN NIGERIA

-- As Justice Minister, Prince Lateef Fagbemi, SAN Commissions NHRC's Lagos State Office at Ikeja

The Federal Government has reiterated its commitment to the promotion, protection and enforcement of human rights in Nigeria by providing the enabling environment for the

National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to effectively realize its mandate.

The Government also promised to support the NHRC to own its offices nationwide to further entrench its independence and strengthen its strive to protect the rights of citizens.

The Honorable Attorney General of the Federation (AGF) and Minister of Justice, Prince Lateef Olasunkanmi, SAN who made this statement on the occasion of the commissioning of the Lagos State office of the NHRC noted that the operational independence of the Commission has been further strengthened with the construction of its own offices.

"Under the Paris Principles, such national human rights institutions are to be independent in the execution of their mandate, structure and operations".



Newly commissioned NHRC Building in Lagos

Section 6(3) of the NHRC Act 1995 as amended, stipulates that the Commission in carrying out its mandate and operations shall not be subject to the control of any authority or person, he added.

"Accordingly, the ownership of their place of operations (office) constitutes an important aspect of their independence. I am happy to say that since this administration, the government has not interfered with the

independence of the Commission", the AGF said.

The Chief Law Officer of the Federation noted that in fact, during the last dissolution of Boards of all parastatals, the government exempted the Governing Council of the Commission from the general dissolution of Federal Government Boards due to its independence under the enabling Act and the Paris Principles.

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AFRICAN COURT, ECOWAS COURT PARTNER NHRC TO TACKLE RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has said that collaborating with the ECOWAS Court of Justice and the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights will facilitate the promotion and protection of human rights across the African Continent. This initiative aims to address the persisting high levels of human rights violations, particularly in recent times.

The Executive Secretary of the Commission, Dr. Tony Ojukwu OFR, SAN who stated this in Abuja when he received a joint delegation



From 3rd Right ES. NHRC Dr. Tony Ojukwu, OFR, SAN, 2nd Right Yusuf Danmadami of the ECOWAS Court, 4th right Dr. Horace Segnoma from African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights flanked by management staff of the Commission and other stakeholders

of African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights (Arusha, Tanzanian) and ECOWAS

Court of Justice (Abuja, Nigeria), noted that the two Courts play complementary roles as far as the mandate of the NHRC and other National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) are concerned.

According to the Chief Human Rights Officer of the Commission, "a Court of Justice is a major environment for the promotion and protection of human rights", adding that since Member nations of ECOWAS and AU desire justice, these two Courts, ECOWAS Court of Justice and African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights were established.

He raised concerns about how the legal system sometimes falls short in delivering real justice, highlighting

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NHRC RECOUNTS EFFORTS TO ADDRESS HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AS DEPUTY PROSECUTOR ICC VISITS

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has reiterated its commitment to cooperate with the government and other stakeholders to tackle human rights violations including the ones occasioned by the insurgency and counter-insurgency operations in Nigeria.

The Executive Secretary (ES) of the Commission, Chief Tony Ojukwu OFR, SAN stated this when he received a delegation from the International Criminal Court (ICC) who were on a working visit to the Country.

While addressing the team led by the Deputy Prosecutor of the ICC, Mame Mandiaye Niang to the Headquarters of the Commission, the ES said the Commission had always demonstrated its readiness to monitor, document and address all forms of human rights violations such as Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), kidnappings, killings, Police brutality, infanticides, etc.

"It will be recalled that the Commission had set up a number of investigative panels on human rights violations such as the Special Investigation Panel on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (2019), two independent investigative panels on Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) and other units of the Nigeria Police Force (2018 and 2020), and Independent Investigative Panel on Human Rights Violations in Counter-Insurgency Operations in the North East Nigeria (2023)", the Executive Secretary stated.

On the report of the North East panel, the Human Rights Advocate informed the ICC



ES NHRC Dr. Tony Ojukwu, OFR, SAN, presenting the NAP document to the Deputy Prosecutor ICC Mame Mandiaye Niang

delegation that the panel and its secretariat had been working hard to unravel the truth in the Reuters four-part reports which alleged that the Nigerian Military was involved in a systematic, secret and illegal abortions resulting in the termination of over 10,000 pregnancies, mass killing of children and other forms of SGBV in the course of its counter-insurgency operations in the North East Nigeria between 2013 and 2021.

The Chief Accounting Officer of the Commission used the opportunity to inform

the Deputy Prosecutor and his team that the Commission presently receives over two million complaints annually with a budget of five billion naira (N5 billion) in the current year.

On the profiling, investigation and trial of Boko Haram suspects who allegedly wreaked havoc and committed a myriad of human rights violations in the Country, the Executive Secretary said that a lot has already been done by the Commission in collaboration with the Office of the Attorney

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that despite people's efforts to seek justice in court, many struggle to afford legal help, due to lack of resources to secure legal representation.

All these hurdles, the Executive Secretary said, have been taken care of by NHRIs like the NHRC where indigent Citizens can easily bring their human rights complaints and they are resolved within a short time.

Briefing the delegation on the operations of the Commission, the erudite lawyer stated that the System the Commission operates is hinged on the principles of fair hearing where parties involved in a matter are given substantial fair hearing.

He also informed the Envoys that the Commission had successfully investigated a series of human rights violations including setting up Investigation panels on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and alleged massive Human Rights abuses by some personnel of the Nigerian Police Force.

Similarly, he told the regional and sub-regional delegations that the NHRC just concluded investigations into allegations of human rights violations against the Nigerian Army in the ongoing counter-insurgency operations in the North East, and that the report of the panel is being awaited.

Reuters, a foreign media Organization had in 2021 published a report that the Nigerian Army was involved in a systematic, secret and forced abortion programme in the course of its counter-insurgency operations in the North East Nigeria resulting in the termination of over 10,000 pregnancies, massive killing of children and other forms of gender-based violence against women.

The Executive Secretary said that the Commission set up an investigative panel which had conducted hearing in Abuja and parts of the North East that were mentioned in Reuters report and that the panel will soon make its findings public just like it did in SARS and SGBV investigations.

He used the opportunity to inform the delegation that Nigeria adopted the National Action Plan which will ensure compliance to human rights principles and practices in the Country, including in the area of Business and Human Rights where companies, Multinational Corporations, etc are mandated to demonstrate compliance to human rights in the environment where they operate.

He also assured the two Groups that the Commission will make extra effort to ensure Nigeria's full compliance to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights especially as it relates to individuals and NGOs having the

right to bring complaints before the African Court.

Earlier, ECOWAS Court had stated that the aim of the visit is to further understand each other's work, collaborate and exchange best practices among the institutions, ECOWAS Court of Justice, African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights and the National Human Rights Commission.

Also, in his remarks at the occasion, Head of Legal Division of African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, Dr. Horace Segnonna said the essence of the visit was to further engage with each other to deepen human rights promotion and protection on the Continent.

According to him, both the NHRC and African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights have a role to play in upholding human rights including to assist people to seek redress when their rights are violated.

He made reference to a toxic waste dumped in Cote d'Ivoire which caused the death of 17 persons and according to him should be a liability to the State.

He emphasized on corporate accountability and coordinated reporting of human rights violations on the Continent saying that institutions are created for the benefit of the people to have improved access to justice. ○

NHRC COMMITTED TO IMPLEMENTING SARS REPORT, OJUKWU TELLS BRITISH DEPUTY HIGH COMMISSIONER

The National Human Rights Commission is committed to collaborating with relevant stakeholders to ensure the implementation of the SARS report in line with the provisions of the law.

The Executive Secretary of the Commission, Dr. Tony Ojukwu (SAN) who stated this when he received the British Deputy High Commissioner to Nigeria, Mrs. Gill Lever Obe noted that apart from the NHRC SARS panel that sat in Abuja, 29 other SARS panels were set up in various states of the federation.

According to the Executive Secretary, upon conclusion of the NHRC's Special Independent Investigation Panel on Allegations of Human Rights Violations by Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) and other Units of the Nigeria Police Force, the Commission paid close to N500 million as compensation to the victims of police brutality.

However, the Human Rights Advocate informed the Deputy High Commissioner and her entourage that of the 29 States that established the SARS panels only Lagos and Ekiti State have paid compensations to victims.

The Chief Executive Officer of the NHRC

informed the British Envoy that the NHRC had earlier submitted the original case file to the Office of the Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice on request. He stated that the Office of the Attorney General of the Federation has indicated that it will reinvestigate the SARS incidents before taking any necessary action. Similarly, Dr. Ojukwu told the Deputy High Commissioner that the NHRC's investigation into allegations of human rights violations contained in the Reuters report has been concluded even though the investigation report is being awaited.

The Executive Secretary also informed the visiting Emissary of the various efforts by the Commission to ensure improved participation of women in politics and elections in Nigeria.

For example, he mentioned the Bill sponsored by the Commission with the support of other stakeholders that sought to designate one additional Senatorial seat for women in the 36 States of the federation and one-third of the House of Representatives seats in every State for women.

The Chief Human Rights Officer of Nigeria stated that the failure of the Bill to pass in the National Assembly was attributed to men

arguing it was discriminatory, he said there is plans for further persuasion to address the gender representation imbalance in the government.

The Secretary of the Special Independent Investigative Panel on Human Rights Violations in Counter-Insurgency Operations in North East Nigeria, Mr. Hilary Ogbonna, told the Deputy High Commissioner the challenge posed by Reuters' refusal to attend the panel's invitation, citing jurisdictional concerns. Despite this setback, the panel managed to proceed with its investigations by gathering testimonies from various relevant parties, including high-ranking Nigerian Army officials, personnel from state institutions, international NGOs, traditional leaders, and community members in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states.

Earlier, the British Deputy High Commissioner had informed the Executive Secretary and his management team that they were in the Commission to ascertain the status of critical allegations of human rights violations in the Country.

She said that the British High Commission is interested in knowing what the NHRC is doing to address these human rights violations in Nigeria. ●

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In her opening remarks, the Chairperson of the Governing Council of the NHRC, Dr. Salamatu Suleiman, ficmc, thanked the Honorable Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, and other highly distinguished guests for gracing the occasion on the completion and commissioning of the Lagos State office of the NHRC in Alausa, Ikeja Lagos.

According to the senior lawyer, the history of the realization of this project needs to be told as a testimony of the determination of the Commission to strengthen its operations and independence.

She recalled that the Commission was established through the NHRC Act 1995 as amended and that in its determination to entrench its independence from the

beginning, the Commission commenced its daily operations from its own independently owned buildings in the six geo-political zonal headquarters of Lagos, Enugu, Port Harcourt, Kano, Jos and Maiduguri between 1996 and 2002.

"Over time however, the acquired Lagos office building was no longer befitting and structurally fit to meet the challenges and demands of a modern office suitable for the operations of a national human rights institution like the Commission.

The need for inclusivity and diversity in the working environment of the Commission necessitated a new office structure after 23 years of the acquisition of the Lagos office building and the other zonal headquarters", the Chairperson narrated.

She observed that things like ramps, lifts, mediation rooms and conference rooms have become key components of any structure for conducting business by a national human rights institution like ours.

The project, she stated, was fully funded by the Federal Government of Nigeria with no donor support.

"The Commission is indeed grateful to the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the Budget office of the Federation, the National Assembly for appropriating funds for the execution of this laudable project. It is our fervent hope that the dream of realizing the construction of the remaining State offices of the Commission will soon be a reality", she added.

In his speech at the occasion, the Executive Secretary of the NHRC, Dr. Tony Ojukwu OFR, SAN said the Commission had identified the ownership of its offices as one of the indices of its independence under the Paris principles from inception, but due to inadequate financial resources in the Commission, it could not continue on the trajectory of owning all its offices, the way it had started at inception from 1996 to 2002.

"It is hoped that by the end of this year, the Commission will be completing at least 8 of the 9 projects while the 9th project will hopefully be completed before the end of 2025. The delivery period has been 4 to 5 years. This is due to the lean financial resources available to the Commission", the Executive Secretary stated. ●

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NHRC RECOUNTS EFFORTS TO ADDRESS HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AS DEPUTY PROSECUTOR ICC VISITS

General of Federation and Minister of Justice. He informed the team that many of the Boko Haram suspects have been tried at Kaiji Barracks (in Niger State) and that more trials are being awaited amid security concerns, recalling that the government is very much worried about the security situation in some parts of the Country.

The Commission's budget, the Executive Secretary stated, is not enough to comprehensively discharge the onerous mandate of the Commission especially as it relates to investigations, facilities maintenance, expenditures on energy and

staff salaries and allowances which gulps about half of the budget.

Earlier, the Deputy Prosecutor of ICC, Niang said the idea behind the visit is to "hear from you on how you go about your business" concerning the various issues of human rights violations in Nigeria.

According to the ICC Senior Official, the work of the Commission is not simple because in the course of investigation, accessing the suspects or witnesses could be an issue, that is why collaboration and the spirit of complementarity becomes imperative towards achieving good results. ●

NEW UN RESIDENT COORDINATOR ASSURES NHRC OF FULL COOPERATION

The new United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator (RC), Mr. Mohamed Malick Fall has assured the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of the full cooperation of his Office to improve the promotion and protection of human rights in Nigeria.

The UN Envoy who stated this in Abuja when he led his team on a familiarization visit to the NHRC assured the Commission of a better and improved working relationship that would enhance the enjoyment of human rights in the Country. The RC highlighted that the NHRC has forged remarkable collaborations and fostered strong relationships with the UN. The official expressed a steadfast commitment to further enhance the collaboration and elevate the partnership to greater heights.

The High-ranking UN Official said that the core mandate of the UN revolves around development, humanitarian work and peacebuilding, adding that "advancing such human rights agenda is not an option" but something we must undertake.

He therefore restated the readiness of the UN to collaborate with the Commission to address issues about Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Women and Children and Vulnerable Group among several others.

The RC observed that Nigeria is strategic to the realisation of human rights on the African Continent and beyond considering its size, land mass and demography, saying that if Nigeria succeeds it will impact on the rest of the African region and the



ES NHRC Dr. Tony Ojukwu presenting UDHR anniversary board to the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator Mr. Mohammed Malick Fall

International Community at large.

Earlier, the Executive Secretary National Human Rights Commission, Dr. Tony Ojukwu OFR, SAN who welcomed the RC and his entourage listed some of the major interventions of the NHRC to address human rights violations in the Country. The Chief Human Rights Officer of Nigeria informed the delegation that the Commission had earlier set up four panels of investigation to tackle the emerging human rights issues across the Nation.

The panels, the Executive Secretary stated,

are two panels on Special Anti-Robber Squad (SARS) of the Nigeria Police Force (2018 and 2020), Special Independent Investigation Panel on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and Special Independent Investigative Panel on Human Rights Violations in Counter-Insurgency Operations in North East, Nigeria.

Similarly, the Human Rights Adviser to the Executive Secretary, Mr Hilary Ogonna told the RC that the Commission has several ongoing human rights projects, pointing out that the major challenge has always been funding.

He told the RC that the Commission is willing to partner with UN towards improving on the existing projects and establishing new ones to further enhance human rights protection in the Country.

STATE OFFICES AT A GLANCE

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