PRESS RELEASE

NASS Resumption: CISLAC demands urgent attention on critical issues

As the National Assembly resumes legislative activities for the year, the Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC) is happy to welcome the legislators to their Chambers. In view of the resumption, we would like to draw the attention of the legislators to critically issues that require urgent legislative attention.

We recall that in September and October, 2019, the Assembly rolled out a legislative agenda, a framework that will guide its operations in the next four years.

In reflection of the Agenda, we are not unaware of commendable initiatives in legislative activities like the recent return of budget cycle to January-December to ensure timely release of funds and cash-backing for the development of the ailing critical sector; Finance Bill, 2019 (now Finance Act) assented by President Muhammadu Buhari, to support the implementation of the 2020 National Budget and to create an enabling environment for businesses; Deep Offshore and Inland Basin Production Sharing Contracts Act Amendment Bill (the Act) to ensure that the Production Sharing Contracts is economically beneficial to the government of the federation; and enhanced open-door policy for Civil Society legislative engagement.

We also applaud the increasing oversight activities by various Committees in the legislature on Ministries, Departments and Agencies, especially on contracts awards, funds allocation and utilisation, to further sanitise the public sector and ensure greater transparency and accountability across the MDAs. This includes the recent legislative move to back calls for constitutional amendment to grant full autonomy to local government areas in the country, to allow self-determination and people-oriented development at grassroots level.

In the spirit of commendations, we would like to draw attention of the legislature to critically issues including the awaiting creation of Constitution Review Committee to address critical and contentious issues in the Constitution; representing reviewed legislative framework for Electoral Reforms Amendment Bill, particularly electronic voting as Section 52(2) of the Bill, to give credibility and transparency to electoral process; verbal approval of the $29.96 billion loan
request forwarded to the Senate by President Muhammadu Buhari in November, without due diligent and thorough scrutiny by the Senate.

We are worried by the continued silence of the Assembly on the long-delayed Petroleum Industry and Governance Bill (PIGB), which seeks to increase government revenue from oil and lay down a strengthened legal and regulatory framework for the Nigerian oil industry.

We are surprised by the emerging effort by the Assembly to provide a legal backing in shrinking civil space in the country through legislative frameworks in the Senate like Hate Speech and Social Media Bills.

We find the appropriation and subsequent approval of whopping sum of N37 billion for NASS rehabilitation in the Appropriation Act, as approved by President Buhari, worrisome despite underfunded critical sector of the economy like health, education and agriculture as well as dilapidating infrastructure facilities across the country.

In view of these, we call on the National Assembly to:

**On Legislation:**

1. Prioritise amendment to Electoral Reforms Act to promote credibility and transparency in the electoral process;
2. Expedite urgent action on Constitutional Amendment to resolve certain fundamental issues;
3. Ensure full domestication of Pending Global and Regional Anti-Corruption Instruments to ensure more coordination and result-oriented approach in anti-corruption fight;
4. Ensure prompt reform of the security sector;
5. Revisit Asset Recovery and Proceed on Crime Bills to provide a legal and institution frameworks for confiscation, seizure and recovery and management of assets or proceeds derived from unlawful activities;
6. Review and revisit Petroleum Industry and Governance Bill (PIGB) to promote transparency, accountability and governance, as well as curtail monumental financial losses in our nation’s oil and gas sector;
7. Provide a legislative backing to the Beneficial Ownership Register on Petroleum sector recently released by the Nigeria Extractive Industries
Transparency Initiative (NEITI) with an extension to other sectors of the economy to ensure sustainability and avert policy summersault;

8. Consider introduction of a legislation to provide a legal backing to the establishment of special courts or strengthen existing courts to expedite justice in corruption through legislative amendments;

9. Provide legislative backing to ensure compliance to various legislative frameworks in the country including Freedom of Information (FOI) Act, Public Procurement Act, National Health Act, and NEITI Remediation;

10. Strengthen the Accountant General Office to ensure compliance to various recommendation by the Office and promote accountability in the allocation and utilisation of public fund;

11. Create National Assembly Budget Office to engage budget scrutiny with thorough recommendations to the Assembly on Appropriation Bill.

On Oversight activities:

1. Intensify legislative oversight to block financial leakages in government;
2. Charge its relevant Committees to exhaustively investigate the reported cases of bribery and corruption.
3. Strengthen oversight on Defence sector as a panacea to restore integrity, reduce leakages and promote accountability in the sector;
4. Through oversight function, engage thorough reconciliation of Defence budget with specific attention to the performance, and constructive audit of performance of various military operations with specific interest in prompt closure of outdated/expired operations across the country;
5. Ensure Basic Health Care Provision Fund is actualised through the 2020 Appropriation Act to provide minimum health care package and revitalise Primary Health Care facilities across the country;

On Constituency Outreach:

1. Develop a framework for constituency engagement and consultation to ensure full participation of electorates and to understand of constituency project implementation.

Signed:

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