PRESS RELEASE

Saraki Trial: Civil Society condemns legislature’s effort to frustrate justice

We the undersigned Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) working to promote justice and good governance in Nigeria have been monitoring with keen interest, the on-going undemocratic, self-serving, and dubious attempt by the Senate of Federal Republic of Nigeria to hast the passage of the proposed amendment to the law setting up the Code of Conduct Bureau and the Code of Conduct Tribunal, with a view to whittling down the agencies’ powers.

We have observed that such uncommon legislative strength, power and time deployed towards the amendment are purposely not to benefit common Nigerians but to escape the Senate President Bukola Saraki—who is presently standing trial before the agencies, from due justice.

In the ongoing trial the Senate President has been indicted for receiving double salaries in Ilorin and Abuja in addition to the allegation of false declaration of assets. He has also breached the law by keeping secret foreign accounts as confirmed by the Panama papers. Saraki has equally been indicted for the forgery of senate rules.

We understand that the Senate President locks up the Senate whenever his case comes up for hearing at the CCT. Yet senators are paid for abandoning their duties to accompany a criminal suspect to court in a country where workers are not paid during strikes. The proposed amendment is a ploy to divert attention from the calls on the senate President to step down which has increased over the Panama papers.

We find it disheartening that amendment to an Act establishing an agency could scale through second reading within a short period of time to deliberately escape an individual from trial in Nigeria, where several Bills that would have served good interest of common Nigerians remain dormant for years in the legislature. Examples of such Bills are Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB), Gender and Equal Opportunity Bill, among others.

While we are aware of all permutations employed by the Senate to render the agencies irrelevant in anti-corruption fight including the untimely claim
that “Code of Conduct Tribunal was delving into criminal proceedings and criminal trial, which was not the intention of the framers of the Act”, we also find worrisome that institution entrusted with upholding the nation’s rule of law only comes to alter constitution when leadership of the Senate is hit by corruption trial.

The speed and intensity of exertion displaced in passage of the proposed amendment expose nothing but questionable level of integrity and accountability, betrayal of public trust, total disregard for administration of justice, and utmost conflict of interest by the 8th Senate, as against the provision of section 172 of the 1999 Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria which states: “A person in the public service of the Federation shall observe and conform to the Code of Conduct”; African Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption, which promotes respect for democratic principles and institutions while supporting rule of law; and United Nations Convention against Corruption which preaches democratic value, sustainable development, and respect for rule of law.

More importantly, as representatives of the people not only do Nigerian Senators derive their mandate directly from the electorate, but also own the electorate proper accountability of their conducts in the legislature. People-oriented legislators must strike effort to contribute to good governance and uphold the national integrity by prioritising important legislative duties to re-install the democratic image and individual confidence both within and outside the country, rather than worthless struggles to alter or sabotage justice and accountability to the advantage of a person or group of persons.

We must remind Nigerian Senate that the on-going injudicious efforts to frustrate trial of the Senator Saraki, if remains persistent would without doubt not only validate several claims accusing the 8th Assembly of lacking moral integrity, but also result in total loss of confidence in the legislature by all well-meaning Nigerians.

We therefore, call on President Muhammad Buhari to promptly shun such suspicious amendment upon it presentation for presidential assent, as it would pose a great setback to his present effort to combat corruption in all ramifications and re-install Nigeria’s image in the international community.
We also urge the House of Representatives to dissociate from endorsing such unscrupulous, immoral and illegal amendment that would amount to mutilation of the Act establishing Code of Conduct Bureau and the Code of Conduct Tribunal.

We encourage the State legislatures to remain committed to the fundamental principle of democracy and good governance by prioritising passage of legislation to promote long-waiting standards of living of their citizens, and avoid replication of such needless amendment at state level.

Signed:

Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD)
Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC)
Centre for Information Technology and Development (CITA)
Zero-Corruption Coalition (ZCC)
Accountability Maternal New-born and Child Health in Nigeria (AMHiN)
Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA)
Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC)
West African Civil Society Forum (WACSOF)
Protest to Power Movement
Partners for Electoral Reform
State of the Union (SOTU)
Advocacy Nigeria
Women in Nigeria