The Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC) observes and urges consciousness on the on-going agitations by some groups calling for separation from an ethnic nationality of our beloved nation, Nigeria.

Apart from Section 39 (1) of the 1999 Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria which provides Nigerian with right to freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference, we are not unaware that 2013 AU African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, an international legal instrument, also recognizes among other things freedoms of information and expression for citizens of member countries.

However, related experiences both within Nigeria and across the continent have revealed that freedom of expression if not carefully exercised, occasionally gives room to dangerous speech, which incites violence or genocide.

It is on this note that we find it worrisome that various media outfits in the country give needless publicity to such sensationalised agitations without considering the awful impacts of the widely condemned provocative speech of Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines in the Rwandan genocide; and Kenya, where the media, particularly local language radio were accused of being responsible for fuelling ethnic hatred and violence in the aftermath of the 2005 referendum campaign and 2007.

While we understand the complexity, dynamism and sensitivity associating with ethno-cultural and religious issues in the country, we call on various groups agitating for division and separation to trend carefully and shun unguarded statements that could result in unwary response or verbal attacks that may further amplify the present tension-soaked

Although we understand that persuasion is better than force as a means of drawing public support or attention, yet we must not conceal that some speeches or statements are in fact dangerous to the co-existence, unity and diversity of Nigeria as a nation.

We call on various interest groups to shun speech or statement involving incitement, false statements of fact, obscenity and threats as hate speech promotes division and intolerance, harms and marginalizes the vulnerable groups it targets.

We urge relevant authorities to prevent breaches of fundamental human rights to protect public orders and maintain sanity in our democracy; ensure adequate protection of targeted group, regarding its members’ feeling and physical safety anywhere in the country. It has been recommended that violence may be prevented by interfering with the process through
inhibiting the speech, limiting its dissemination, undermining the credibility of the speaker, or inoculating the audience against the speech so that it is less influential, or dangerous.

We demand strict adherence to and recognition of fundamental human rights of every Nigerian citizen to reside and legally conduct businesses or commercial activities anywhere in the country.

We further urge the media at all levels to discourage divisive or sensationalised statements that could halt peaceful co-existence among various ethnic groups to achieve secured, healthy and prosperous nation.

Signed

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