PRESS RELEASE

9th National Assembly @1: CISLAC commends the legislature, calls for increased priority in legislative activities

The Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC) joins all well-meaning Nigerians to felicitate with the 9th National Assembly on its first year in steering the wheel of the national legislative affairs.

We acknowledge various initiatives by the legislature like the 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; the passage of Emergency Stimulus Bill, 2020, as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic to mitigate impacts on businesses and individuals in Nigeria.

We commend the sustained open-door policy by the legislature for Civil Society legislative engagement, just as we applaud the recent mainstreaming of information technology in technical proceedings in the legislative rules and protocols to enhance the legislative process, citizens’ participation in legislative activities in the face of Covid-19 pandemic era.

We are not unaware of recurring oversight activities by various Legislative Committees of the National Assembly including those targeted at appropriations and blocking of financial leakages across Ministries, Departments and Agencies as well as persistent probes of alleged fraud and mismanagement of funds and flouting of Federal Character Act across MDAs.

In the spirit of commendations, we would like to attention of the legislature to the following areas of priority awaiting significant improvement, as it steps into another legislative year.

Legislation:

Despite its articulation in the 9th Legislative Agenda, we are surprised at lack of substantial effort by the National Assembly towards amendment to the Electoral Reforms Act to address current trends and challenges, promote credibility and transparency in the electoral process.

We are worried over continuous delay in introduction of appropriate legislative framework to improve coordination and result-oriented approach in anti-corruption fight through full domestication of Pending Global and Regional Anti-Corruption Instruments; review of 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; back disclosure of beneficial owners of licenses in the oil sector and the publicizing of oil and mining contracts, as recommended by the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI)
and the Open Government Partnership Commitments; activate full domestication of pending Global and Regional Anti-Corruption Instruments to improve coordination and ensure a result-oriented approach in the anti-corruption fight and to prevent misuse and mismanagement of COVID-19 expenditures and palliatives.

We observed that various anti-graft agencies would continue to pay lip service to war against corruption in the country without a comprehensive legislation on Asset Recovery and Proceed on Crime to provide legal and institutional frameworks for confiscation, seizure and recovery and management of assets or proceeds derived from unlawful activities.

Despite persistent clamour by the people and Civil Society groups, the National Assembly, is yet to consider introduction of legislation to provide legal backing to the establishment of special courts or strengthen existing courts to expedite justice on corruption cases through legislative amendments including cases of suspected mismanagement and misappropriation of COVID-19 expenditures; as well passage of Whistle-blower Protection Bill so that mismanagement and misappropriation of governmental funds, including COVID-19 palliatives are disclosed with the guarantee of anonymity to insiders.

We demand comprehensive of the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) Act, to cover all citizens of Nigeria not just civil servants; increased budgetary allocation to the health sector to fulfil the Abuja Declaration of at least 15%; increased priority for the Basic Health Care Provision fund in the health budget with thorough oversight of relevant ministries, departments, and agencies to ensure compliance in the implementation of various provisions.

**Oversight:**

Twelve months after its inauguration, we are concerned that the 9th Assembly has not devised an all-inclusive strategy for effective oversight duty to cover the implementation of projects, compliance to laws, orders, and policies within state and non-state actors; and identify specific legislative oversight to block financial leakages in government, given the recent unaccounted inflows and outflows of foreign and domestic assistance on Covid-19 pandemic.

We are perturbed by lack of significant improvement in its oversight function on revenues accruing to the government from other revenue streams apart from the oil and gas sector including utilization of donated and borrowed funds by the Government of Nigeria to ensure that the emergency funding serves the intended purpose of preserving the health and livelihood of the nation.

While we demand formalisation of a holistic Monitoring and Evaluation system to evaluate implementation and impacts of laws in ensuring laws are in tandem with societal expectation, we also call for sincere legislative effort to strengthen the Accountant General’s Office to ensure compliance with the various recommendation by the Office and promote accountability in the allocation and utilization of public funds intended to counter COVID-19 and to provide economic stimulus packages; analyze and review the annual reports of the
Office of the Auditor General of the Federation (OAGF) and take an action against MDAs that did not submit their audited accounts as mandated by the Law; ensure that procurement processes conducted by the respective MDAs are transparent and in line with existing legal and policy frameworks.

**Representation:**

We observed continued flaw in representation as reveals by Covid-19 pandemic including total disconnect between representation and people’s expectations with weak feedback mechanisms to the government at all levels.

We demand adequate representation through constructive consultation to efficiently capture the needs and priorities of the constituents with full operationalization of Constituency Offices, which constitutes the center of legislators’ duty at the NASS.

We encourage the National Assembly to develop a framework for constituency engagement and consultation to ensure full participation of electorates in legislative activities.

**Constituency outreach:**

Just as democracy’s credibility and sustainability depends, to a large extent, on effective citizens’ participation, and on what it delivers, the quality of democratic politics diminishes if citizens are ignorant about legislature.

We are worried that functional Constituency Office has not been mainstreamed as a major legislative priority despite its importance to promote inclusive process and harmonise constructive inputs into legislative process as it affect the people.

To strengthen its relation with the constituency, we call for open legislature to ensure National Assembly is available and accessible to the public with legislators reporting back to the constituents on what is happening in the Assembly.

We reiterate our position for a functional Constituency Office and constant communication with constituency to establish workable relationship with the constituents for appropriate feedback mechanism and proper representation.

Signed:

**Auwal Ibrahim Musa (Rafsanjani)**

Executive Director, CISLAC