



Committee for the Defence of Human Rights



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PUBLIC STATEMENT

CDHR AND CREDIBLE CIVIL SOCIETIES CAN NEVER BE COMPROMISED OF BLACKMAILED BY MUDSLINGERS IN EFCC

The Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR) deems it necessary to react to the jittery press release issued by one Femi Babafemi on behalf of the EFCC on Wednesday 1/6/2011 in which he, as is customary of his office, concocted series of false allegations against the CDHR and also attempted to divide and incite members of the CDHR against each other in order to cripple the CDHR which has been at the fore-front of exposing and doggedly fighting issues of corruption to logical conclusion in Nigeria. It is public knowledge that the CDHR has been consistently very critical of Mrs. Farida Waziri, the Chairperson of the EFCC before and after her appointment by the Federal Government on the ground that she lacks the credibility rating and antecedent that will make her enhance and push forward the anti corruption crusade in Nigeria as Head of the EFCC. In order to protect the EFCC as an institution that came about consequent upon years of agitation by the people of Nigeria, the CDHR joined other credible Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to publicly oppose the appointment of Mrs. Farida Waziri and even organised public protest at the entrance of the Lagos office of the EFCC on the day she was supposed to assume duty. Thereafter, the EFCC made several attempts to drag the CDHR into a compromising partnership which was rebuffed by the CDHR leadership. Specifically, the CDHR refused to be part of the Program established by the EFCC to compromise CSOs which program has now collapsed due to negative reasons that are well known to Civil Society organisations involved. It is public knowledge that the leadership of the CDHR has been consistent in demanding for the removal of the Chairperson of the EFCC at every opportunity in every media and fora. We are aware the EFCC is not happy with the CDHR hence are eager to deploy their huge mudslinging machinery to smear the uncompromised integrity of CDHR and thereby silence the most strident critic of the EFCC leadership which authorised the content of the press statement.

Background

As a result of the public declarations made by President Goodluck Jonathan during the days leading to his inauguration as President to the effect that he is prepared to pursue the fight against corruption more vigorously in Nigeria, and as part of our regular interventions, the CDHR decided to organise a forum for Civil Society Organisations within the premises of our National Secretariat at the Rights House, 43 Adeniyi Jones Avenue, Ikeja to take the President to task on the anti-corruption war in Nigeria. The background note and invitation to the program dated May 26, 2011 was circulated via various media including CDHR facebook site to the general public. In line with their trademark and because they are never comfortable with the stance of CDHR, the EFCC promptly unleashed its propaganda machinery to pre-empt the program by smearing the character of the leadership of the organisation as done in their press statement

REPORT OF THE ANTI CORRUPTION FORUM

In spite of the propaganda against the Forum, the program proceeded as planned and even the EFCC also mobilised their agents to the program who made unsuccessful efforts to discredit the Forum and its host organisation. If not for the civilian government in place, they would have physically prevented the program as it used to be done during the dark military era but they were overwhelmed by the teeming number of participants.

After interactive discussions from different perspectives, the group of panellists and participants at the well attended forum observed and resolved as follows:

- That since assumption of the office of the EFCC Chairperson by Mrs Farida Waziri, the integrity rating of the EFCC has nosedived hence there is need to deliver the EFCC as an institution from the hands of those using it to achieve purposes different from its statutory mandate.
- That if the President is to succeed in his avowed determination to battle corruption, the integrity deficient Chairperson of the EFCC, Mrs. Farida Waziri, must be removed and replaced with a more vibrant person with very high integrity rating otherwise the EFCC may remain a shadow of itself.
- That whereas the EFCC has all the statutory powers and resources to prevent the looting of public fund, the regular allegations of stealing of public fund in the media is confirmation that the EFCC under Mrs. Farida Waziri deliberately permit public funds to be stolen first only to thereafter begin to cry foul in the media. The EFCC ought to be proactive as prevention is always better and cheaper than cure.
- That the media and publicity department of the EFCC is currently the most active and that a situation in which the EFCC is heavy in the media but light in delivering on its mandate is unacceptable and does not portray competence and hard work on the part of the leadership.

- That plea bargaining and nolle prosequi are other avenue for corruption which frustrates the anti-corruption crusade; they are also discriminatory against the poor common offenders who are never allowed to plea-bargain whereas the powerful offenders who steal billions enjoy plea-bargaining and escape with very light punishment if nolle prosequi is not entered hence plea-bargaining is unconstitutional and should be discarded.
- That the challenges used to excuse its failures by the EFCC under Mrs. Farida Waziri (like the clamour for special courts due to delay in trial by courts) have always been there but that the EFCC surmounted same challenges under the previous chairman of the Commission. The EFCC is sufficiently empowered to surmount the challenges if a competent person is at the helm of affairs. Hence the EFCC should stop buck-passing.
- That there is need for Civil Society Organisations to continue to closely monitor the activities of the EFCC, ICPC, CCB, etc. and the cases they investigate or prosecute in court to ensure the interest of the public is not compromised.
- That Civil Society Organisations must ensure that their integrity is untainted so as to put them in a better moral pedestal to monitor the anti-corruption agencies as whoever comes to equity must come with clean hands.
- That the signing into law of the Freedom of Information Act has opened another window of opportunity to combat corruption and other vices and to hold government accountable to the people hence Civil Society Organisations should braze up and be prepared to ensure the achievement of the good purposes of the FOI Act.

RESPONSE TO THE FALSE ALLEGATIONS

For record purpose and in response to the wild allegations made by the said jittery Babafemi outside the purview of the EFCC Act, we hereby ask and declare as follows:

That if the CDHR leadership is compromised as falsely alleged, why did Babafemi and his boss become jittery suddenly and why did he not attend the program personally to ventilate his position with facts at the Forum to which the general public was invited instead of spending tax payers money on full pages advertorial contracts awarded by his office which has become a den for media racketeering and mudslinging?

Why is it difficult for Babafemi and his boss to believe that there are sincere and patriotic Nigerians who can spearhead public issues without being paid by anyone? This is because they

believe every other person is like them who sell their conscience to any buyer.

Why is Babafemi and his boss unable to mention the name of the alleged hirer of the CDHR leadership in their statement?

That the CDHR and or its President did not receive N52 Million or any financial support from and neither were we hired by any person to organise our regular program (as falsely alleged by Babafemi even on Channels Television Sunrise Program on 2/6/2011) and we really do not need to because the program took place right within the premises of our secretariat where we have all the space and facilities for such a program. It is glaring that Babafemi and his boss are ignorant of the history and strength of the CDHR as a membership based organisation with branches in Fifteen States of Nigeria from which members pay their annual dues and other contributions and donations to the organisation. He also demonstrated his ignorance when he claimed that Mrs. Ayo Obe is a former leader of the CDHR. She was never a President of the CDHR hence Babafemi should never use her name in his desperation to retain his job and that of his boss in EFCC.

The charge that the President of the CDHR received N52m to frustrate EFCC is not a media matter. It simply means that the EFCC has concluded its investigation hence we challenge Obafemi and Madam Waziri to charge the matter to court immediately. Otherwise, we hereby give him notice to be prepared to substantiate his allegation in a court of law as his wild and spurious allegations are defamatory of the CDHR, its President and teeming members all over Nigeria. He should be prepared to substantiate his allegation that the leadership of the CDHR received N52m to scuttle EFCC operation in court. He will be contacted by our lawyers soon.

CHALLENGES TO BABAFEMI AND HIS BOSS

We note the attempt by Babafemi to further deceive the people of Nigeria by claiming that the EFCC under Madam Farida Waziri has recorded notable achievements in the pursuit of the statutory mandate of the EFCC. WE challenge Babafemi and his boss to publish within 3 days the details of the 11 billion dollars he claimed was recovered by Madam Farida Waziri within the last 3 years. They should spell out how much was recovered from who and when and to account for where the amount is now.

WE challenge Babafemi to account for why the EFCC has lost steam and the confidence of the masses to the extent that majority of Nigerians are now

turning their complaints of corruption to the ICPC and also prefer to report other Economic and Financial crimes to the Special Fraud Unit of the Nigeria Police Force instead of the EFCC.

WE challenge Obafemi to publish the list of the 65 high profile cases and of the 1,500 other cases he claimed the EFCC under Madam Waziri is busy prosecuting with details of their date of commencement and the present stage of all the cases. He should also explain why most of the cases could not proceed in court and why there has been no conviction in any of the high profile cases since Madam Waziri became the Chair of the EFCC. This is necessary because we are aware that almost all the EFCC officers that investigated the cases and are supposed to give evidence for the prosecution of the cases were all chased away from the EFCC by Mrs. Farida Waziri in order to deliberately frustrate the cases. We are not convinced that Madam Waziri took the decision in good faith or without compromise. The pioneer Director of Operations she chased away has just been recalled to help shore up the misfortune of EFCC under her leadership yet the same EFCC Chairperson has turned round to blame the court, defence lawyers and the office of the Attorney General of the Federation and even the Presidency to cover her incompetence.

Babafemi and his boss should be ashamed for compromising public interest in the case of Igbinedion who was given a pat on the back with the plea bargaining of 3 Million naira as fine for stealing over 2 Billion. The purported appeal is just to deceive the masses and further deplete the purse of the EFCC for the benefit of their hired lawyers.

CONCLUSION

The CDHR is concerned about the huge mudslinging enterprise/racket within the EFCC which has become and is being used as a tool to blackmail and smear persons and organisations against whom they have been deployed by the sponsors of such campaign. This EFCC corrupt media racket must be exposed and silenced once and for all. We oppose the use of the EFCC to further personal interests. We have no sympathy for Babafemi or his boss Madam Waziri because their jobs are on the line as a result of our campaign.

The Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR) is determined to continue to advance the anti-corruption campaign against whosoever in the interest of the disempowered and suffering mass of our people and the line is now clearly drawn with the merchants of corruption in Nigeria hiding under the EFCC. We have all our facts and Nigerians are also submitting facts to us. We and other credible CSOs cannot be compromised or blackmailed to stop the battle against corruption.

(Signed)
COMRADE OLASUPO OJO
President

(Signed)
COMRADE MBADIWE AHIKWO
General Secretary