



promoting human rights

NIGERIA #ENDSARS PROTESTS AND THE AFTERMATH

Position of Lawyers Alert

Lawyers Alert condemns in the strongest terms the use of live ammunitions on protesters who were only armed with national flags and the national anthem and the consequent loss of lives of innocent and defenceless Nigerians in their prime. No lawful and democratic society condones extrajudicial killings in any form. Every person has a right to live and such a right cannot be taken away by anyone except in accordance with the law.

Lawyers Alert acknowledges the Constitutional Rights of citizens to embark on peaceful protests and it is in this light that we also strongly condemn the use of military personnel under any guise to quell protests within the civic space. The result can only be and has been fatalities.

We also condemn the degeneration of the protest into rioting. In Abuja alone, no fewer than 50 vehicles were razed. The same goes for Lagos where Media Houses, a Traditional Ruler's Palace, Police Stations, a warehouse, and shopping malls were vandalized and in some instances burned. A number of Police Officers were also lynched. In Edo, there was the incident of a jailbreak where inmates were set free while Kano and Jos witnessed misguided reprisal attacks with a number of churches burned.

We acknowledge the rights of the citizenry to move freely and own property. These are fundamental rights that are inalienable.

We note the genesis of the unfortunate happenings. Citizens, mainly the Youth commenced protests owing to killings and various human rights abuses against them by the men of the Police Force, particularly the special unit of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad, SARS. Their demands were the disbandment of SARS, identification and sanctioning of rogue officers, the release of the illegally detained, and compensation to victims or their families amongst others.

The government did yield to these requests by disbanding SARS, setting up Judicial Panels of Inquiry, and calling for negotiations. Owing to previous unkept promises by the government and the consequent lack of trust, youths shunned these measures, and continued the protest, leading to the present situation.

Recommendations

In light of the foregoing, Lawyers Alert recommends the following:

- The Federal Government should keep open its earlier invitation to the Protesters to the negotiation table. The Protesters should accept the government invitation to dialogue towards the realisation of the demands of the protesters and suspend the protests. Lawyers Alert recognises the lack of trust for government promises by the youth, which is justifiable given past experiences. We however advise that timelines be set for the delivery of every demand with responsible agency clearly defined. There is no better time to do this than now.
- The National Assembly should conduct a hearing/investigation into what transpired at the Lekki toll gate on 20/10/2020 that led to the loss of lives owing to killings allegedly carried out by soldiers. This hearing should unravel questions like who ordered soldiers to Lekki Toll Gate, the actual number of lives lost, the identity of victims, and comprehensive sanctions of any individual directly or indirectly connected to the incident.
- Lawyers Alert urges groups and persons to approach the Judicial Panels of Inquiry to lay their grievance towards the identification of culpable SARS officers for appropriate sanctions and the compensation of victims.
- The government should embark on comprehensive reform of the police, with emphasis on oversight functions, tethering oversight to citizens groups, the National Assembly, Internal Police oversight, the National Human Rights Commission, and most importantly, the Police Service Commission which is the constitutional body with the mandate of oversight.

God Bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Lawyers Alert
21-10-2020.