



Lawyers Alert

ENDSARS IN NIGERIA: LAWYERS ALERT'S INTERVENTION.

BACKGROUND

Nigeria recently experienced social protest over the activities of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a unit of the Nigeria Police Force. Over the years, SARS had been accused of a range of extra judicial actions ranging from unlawful arrests to extortion and killings. Most of these accusations went uninvestigated and unpunished, owing to poor state protection and lack of accountability mechanisms for the state security apparatus.

A good number of Nigerians have alleged instances of suffering as a direct result of SARS un-restrained activities which suddenly culminated in a 2-week protest tagged **#ENDSARS**. As public buildings, private residences and police officers and structures came under attack, the country was shut down and soldiers had to be deployed to restore normalcy. By this time, many lives had been lost in addition to property worth a few billions.

The Federal Government in a bid to fully investigate the circumstances leading to the unrest and restore public confidence in the state, set up Judicial Panels of Inquiry across the country. The panels were tasked with identifying individuals who participated in the wanton destruction of lives and property for sanctions and also identifying victims of both SARS and the unrest for compensation. A compensation fund has also been created and resourced while SARS has since been disbanded. The Panel of Inquiries are sitting in 32 States, including the Federal Capital Territory.

LAWYERS ALERTS' EFFORTS

In tandem with prior engagements on issues of democracy and good governance in Nigeria, L A embarked on key activities aimed at protecting and advancing the rights of citizens who suffered as a result of the activities of SARS and the #ENDSARS protests. These efforts are listed below.

Issuing of a press release: A Press Release **"#ENDSARS PROTESTS AND THE AFTERMATH"** stating Lawyers Alert's position and recommendations was issued in the heat of the #ENDSARS protest. In the statement, Lawyers Alert condemned in strong terms the alleged use of live ammunitions on unarmed protesters. L A also condemned the degeneration of the peaceful protests into

riots, where property and lives were lost across the country. A critical recommendation as contained in the press release is that 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 (see [link](#)).

Participation at the Protest: Lawyers Alert acknowledged the Constitutional Rights of citizens to embark on peaceful protests, and free movement. Indeed L A participated in the peaceful protest in the nation's capital to lend voice to the spirit of the protest with regard to the gross abuse of power displayed by SARS officers in the discharge of their duties.

Training of the Judicial Panel of Inquiry: In partnership with the International Court of Justice, ICJ, L A trained and enhanced the capacity of members of the Judicial Panel of Inquiry in understanding human rights, its dynamics and international best practices. This was done to aid the panel towards providing better judgment especially regarding issues relating to women. It should be noted that women equally suffered human rights violations, including sexual molestation from SARS.

Representation of women at the Judicial Panel of Inquiry: Women who have been victims of SARS are equally entitled to approach these Judicial Panels for compensation. Given Lawyers Alert's mandate for enhancing the rights of women in Nigeria and our support to women in the past to approach several panels of investigations and the National Human Rights Commission Special Panel of Investigation with regards to harassment of Female Sex Workers in Nigeria, we are currently representing women appearing before these Judicial Panels across the country with a view to obtaining justice.

RECOMMENDATIONS BY LAWYERS ALERT

Flowing from engagement and interaction amongst Lawyers, the Nigeria Police Force, Women and critical stakeholders; the following are recommended:

- i. A comprehensive reform of the Nigeria Police Force and other security agencies, with emphasis on oversight functions.
- ii. An accountability path-way for members of the Judicial Panel of Inquiry to report back to citizens on its engagement with women and other complainants.
- iii. An increase in the duration of the sittings of the Judicial Panel of Inquiry to accommodate more complainants.
- iv. Mechanisms for the monitoring of police conduct post ENDSARS protest.
- v. Monitoring of the compensation fund towards accountability.

CONCLUSION

Much has been done to empower the Nigeria Police Force with regard to how it treats citizens it is meant to protect. However, there still exists a need to ensure the continued protection of lives and property with best practices observed. This speaks to the need for adequate advocacy and sensitization of Security agencies and management. In addition to equipping the Nigeria Police Force, there is also a need to continuously engage with the Judicial Panel of Inquiry for accountability purposes and to report back on the dispensation of judgment.