



National Human Rights Commission

SPEECH BY DR. TONY OJUKWU OFR, SAN, THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION AT THE PRESENTATION OF MARCH 2025 HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION DASHBOARD

Date: 4th April 2025

Good morning, esteemed colleagues, partners, human rights defenders, and members of the press,

Today, as we gather for the March edition of our human rights dashboard, we are again confronted with the stark realities shaping the lives of Nigerians. This is not a time for complacency or recycled clichés. We must speak clearly, honestly, and with urgency, demanding accountability where it is due.

Our offices in Abuja and throughout the 36 states of the Federation have worked diligently to collate and analyze the numerous complaints received by the Commission, as well as to monitor and report on other human rights violations across the country through our human rights observatory.

In the month of March, we received a total of 246,200 complaints. This number reflects the ongoing challenges and protection gaps we face in securing human rights for all Nigerians. Notably, violations involving state actors and violations related to freedom from discrimination remain of significant concern. These issues are not isolated; they are systemic, and they demand our collective attention and action.

March also saw a disturbing increase in terrorist groups attacking vulnerable communities across Nigeria. These violent assaults represent not only security breaches but also fundamental violations of the most basic human rights, the right to life, the right to personal security, and the right to live free from fear. Equally alarming is the surge in targeted abduction of religious leaders, a deliberate strategy that not violates their personal safety, but assaults the very principles of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.

The NHRC strongly condemns the invasion of the Ikeja Electricity Distribution Company headquarters by personnel from the Nigerian Air Force at the Sam Ethnan Air Force Base in Ikeja, Lagos State. The brutal assault of workers violated basic rights to safety, dignity, and freedom from abuse. It is especially shocking that security forces harmed those they should protect. We are seeing a pattern of abuse of authority by those who wear uniforms and this should be condemned in the strongest terms. Such actions undermine public trust and cannot be tolerated. The NHRC demands immediate accountability and justice for the victims, and we call on the military, security and law

enforcement agencies to commit to discharging their duties within the ambits of the law and with utmost respect for the dignity of the human person.

The tragic killing of 16 hunters by local vigilantes on the Uromi/Obajana Expressway in Edo state is another heartbreaking reminder of the dangers posed by jungle justice. While we commend Governor Monday Okpebholo for his swift action in responding to the incident, we must not lose sight of the big picture: ensuring that no one, whether accused or victim, is denied a fair and just process. It is essential to remember that every individual has the right to life, as enshrined in our Constitution and other regional and international instruments. While we understand the sentiments and the need for strong measures against such heinous acts, it is crucial to uphold the rights of the accused and ensure that justice is administered in a manner consistent with international human rights standards.

Similarly, the Supreme Court's recent death sentence given to Sunday Jackson for the killing a Fulani herdsman in an alleged act of self-defence is of grave concern. One can describe it as an assault on the soul of human rights in Nigeria. Section 33 of our Constitution guarantees the right to life, explicitly recognizing self-defense as a sacred shield against unlawful violence. To sentence Sunday Jackson to death for protecting his own life is dangerous precedent. We call on Governor Ahmadu Umaru Fintiri to exercise his constitutional power of clemency under Section 212 of the Constitution and spare Jackson's life. Justice must never equate to punishment for the defenseless.

Despite the daunting challenges we face, I must emphasize that our work at the National Human Rights Commission does not end with the publication of this dashboard. This dashboard serve as a clarion call for all of us – government, civil society, and the international community – to take concrete action. We have a mandate to act with urgency and to demand systemic reforms that address these violations at their root.

Ladies and gentlemen, the NHRC will continue to use every tool, mandate and powers available to it as a Status A National Human Rights Institution to continue to promote and protect the rights of Nigerians and non-Nigerians without discrimination. Today I am honoured to signing an **Advisory Opinion on the Right to Freedom of Expression in Nigeria issued pursuant to Section 5 (l)(m)(o) of the National Human Rights Commission Act (as amended) of 2010**. This Advisory is not just a document, it is a well thought out Instrument aimed at serving as a Guideline to law enforcement, the judiciary, the media, civil society and the general public on the importance of the Freedom of Expression and the need to protect it in the face of recent violations orchestrated by the enforcement of Section 24 of the Cyber Crimes Act. The NHRC holds the view that the Freedom of Expression is sacrosanct and any legislation seeking to abridge it must not be vague or open to abuse by law enforcement and should be justified in the spirit of our Constitution in a democratic society.

Let me conclude with this: human rights are not abstract ideals to be debated only in halls like this or confined to the pages of reports. They are the air we breathe, the foundation of our dignity, and the hope we pass to our children. When a farmer is sentenced to death for defending his life, when a child's future is cut short by violence, when a citizen's cry for justice goes unanswered, we all lose something essential.

I thank the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for their continued support. I also extend my appreciation to our tireless staff across the country, the media, all our stakeholders, and you all whose contributions continue to make a tangible difference in the enjoyment of human rights of Nigerians.

It is up to us to work together to ensure that human rights are not luxury, but an undeniable reality for all Nigerians from the streets of Lagos to the heart of Adamawa.

Thank you once more for attending the dashboard presentation.

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