



National Human Rights Commission

**STATEMENT BY DR. TONY OJUKWU SAN OFR, THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY,
NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION AT THE ACCESS TO JUSTICE
COORDINATION FORUM ON HIV AND OTHER MARGINALIZED GROUPS IN NIGERIA**

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Distinguished Guests, Partners, and Stakeholders,

It is with great honour and a deep sense of responsibility that I welcome you all to this **Access to Justice Coordination Forum on HIV and Other Marginalized Groups in Nigeria**. I want to express my gratitude and that of the Commission to the National Agency for the Control of AIDS and the Global Funds for the support the NHRC is receiving in the Grant Cycle 7 to promote and protect the rights of persons living with HIV/AIDS and key populations in Nigeria.

The NHRC has a long history of working with NACA. We are pleased that today; we are marking another chapter in our relationship with the commencement of implementation of the GC7 programmes. I want to specially thank Madam DG and her staff who have worked with us over the last months to make our partnership possible. Permit me to commend Dr Chigozie Ujam and his unit for working tirelessly to achieve this feat.

The idea of an Access to Justice Forum has been well thought out to bring relevant stakeholders in the human rights and justice sectors together to streamline actions and ensure effectiveness in our respective mandates to enables us serve better the vulnerable populations that have arisen either as a result of economic, social or legal impediments.

The National Human Rights Commission has unique mandates by national law and international convention to investigate, monitor and make determination on human rights violations in Nigeria. We have deployed this mandate to the protection of the rights of Nigerians without discrimination to political, economic, social, or ethnic status or sexual orientation. Chapter 4 of the Nigerian Constitution is blind to status and so is all human rights legislations enacted in Nigeria and international instruments to which Nigeria has ratified. NHRC therefore remains steadfast in its commitment to promoting and protecting the rights of all persons, particularly those most vulnerable in our society.

We are honoured as a Commission to be convening this Access to Justice Coordination Forum, but we do this mindful of equally important and complimentary mandates of other agencies of government and non-state actors.

Access to justice is a fundamental pillar of human rights and the rule of law. It ensures that individuals, regardless of their socio-economic status, gender, health condition, or background, can seek and obtain remedies when their rights are violated. This forum is a

crucial step in strengthening our collective efforts to bridge the justice gap for people living with **HIV/AIDS, key populations, and other marginalized groups** who continue to face stigma, discrimination, and systemic barriers in accessing legal redress and social justice.

Despite significant progress in addressing HIV-related discrimination, many affected individuals still encounter violations of their rights in healthcare, employment, and social settings. Stigma continues to fuel fear, misinformation, and exclusion, making it imperative for us to reinforce legal protections and ensure that justice mechanisms are accessible, responsive, and effective.

The enactment of the Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Act of 2014 has equally brought to the fore challenges of discrimination, indiscriminate arrest, torture and inhuman and degrading treatment on key populations in Nigeria. NHRC and other organisations have been on the forefront in seeking for justice for victims of human rights violations related to sexual or gender identity across Nigeria. We will not stop.

With the support of the Global Fund, the NHRC will be embarking on within the next two years, series of programs, capacity building, policy and legal reforms to protect the rights of Nigerian from discrimination and criminalisation. We shall also be setting up institutional measures to provide access to justice, and working with other partners to support class and individual legal actions in line with sections 5 and 6 of the NHRC (Amendment) Act of 2010.

As we gather here today, let us recognize the power of **collaboration and multi-sectoral coordination** in addressing these challenges. The role of government agencies, civil society organizations, legal practitioners, healthcare providers, and development partners cannot be overemphasized. Together, we must:

1. **Enhance legal awareness** – Empowering individuals with knowledge of their rights is crucial in preventing violations and ensuring accountability.
2. **Strengthen legal aid and support mechanisms** – Expanding access to legal services and human rights institutions will provide a lifeline to those who seek justice.
3. **Advocate for policy reforms** – Laws and policies must reflect inclusivity and protection for all, ensuring that marginalized groups are not left behind.
4. **Combat stigma and discrimination** – We must continue to engage communities, media, and policymakers in dismantling harmful stereotypes that fuel injustice.

The NHRC is committed to working closely with all stakeholders to **safeguard human rights and promote social justice for all persons**. However, no individual agency no matter how well resourced can achieve access to justice alone. We believe that this forum will continue to work together, generate and share best practices, contribute organisational resources and jointly advocate for stronger legal frameworks, improved access to justice, and better protection for people living with HIV and other key populations and marginalized people in Nigeria.

Once again, I thank NACA and the Global Funds and other partners that are here today for your support to the promotion and protection of human rights in Nigeria.

As our slogan for this Forum goes, let us work together to achieve “Human Rights, Dignity and Justice for All”

Thank you

Dr. Tony Ojukwu

Executive Secretary

National Human Rights Commission