



PROPOSED BILL ON REGULATION OF NGOs INIMICAL TO FREEDOM OF SPEECH

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ABUJA, NIGERIA -

The attempt to regulate Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's), by a law of the National Assembly will do more harm than good and the Federal House of Representatives has been admonished to trash the proposed Bill before the House in this respect.

The call was made by the Catholic Bishop of Sokoto Diocese, Most Rev. Matthew Hassan Kukah and the Catholic Caritas Foundation of Nigeria, in their presentations before the House of Representatives; during a public hearing on the proposed bill, recently.

Speaking in conjunction with leaders of other non-Governmental agencies in the country; Bishop Kukah while urging the discarding of the proposed Bill stated that the National Assembly will make Nigerians happier by concentrating on ensuring institutions of government wake up to their responsibilities in the performance of their duties.

Noting that there is the need for a convergence of ideas between the political class and the citizens; Bishop Kukah declared: “We have enough laws in Nigeria to cover every aspect of our national life. The intentions of the bill may be right but we should channel our energies to other things.” He reminded the lawmaker of the role the CSOs played in returning the country to democratic governance in 1999 and supported the agitation of the organizations that the proposed bill should be trashed.

In a Memorandum sent to the House of Representatives in respect of the proposed bill; the Catholic Caritas Foundation of Nigeria (CCFN) noted that the proposed bill is “designed to strangle Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs)”; adding that there are enough existing laws and regulations to see to the smooth and efficient operation of NGOs.

The CCFN while outlining the existing laws that regulate the operations of NGOs in the country, identified areas of concern which made the proposed bill obnoxious and not in the interest of the people of the country.

The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria NGO noted that the proposed bill consist of draconian laws and have been used in some African countries to “muzzle freedom of speech and put in check any form of criticism against the State.

The CCFN while advising Non-Governmental organizations in the country to be prudent and carry out their activities according to the laid down laws of the country noted that: “While we may have among the NGOs, the main concern of all arms of government should be how how to change the perception of Nigerians about government as ineffective, corrupt, wasteful and lacking vision. The organization’s memorandum was signed by Rev. Fr. Evaristus Bassey, the National Director of Caritas Nigeria and Justice Development and Peace Commission (JDPC).

The Bill titled “A Bill for an Act to provide for the Establishment of Non-Governmental Organizations Regulatory Commission for the Supervision, Coordination and Monitoring of Non-Governmental Organizations, Civil Societies Organizations etc, in Nigeria and for related matters was presented to the House of Representatives by Honourable Umar Buba Jubril. The CCFN advised the Honourable Umar Buba Jubril to withdraw the bill and stop adding fuel to the already heated polity.