

POLICY DIALOGUE ON ENTRENCHING TRANSPARENCY IN PUBLIC SERVICE RECRUITMENT PROCESS IN NIGERIA

Welcome Remarks

by

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Protocol

It is my honour and privilege to welcome you all to this important Policy Dialogue on *Entrenching Transparency in Public Service Recruitment Process in Nigeria*. This is the Fourth in our Policy Dialogue Series since the first one held on April 16, 2019 on 'Eradicating Electoral Corruption (Focus on Vote Buying)'. It may also interest you to know that the second Policy Dialogue which was held on September 11, 2019, focused on 'Accountability for Security Votes: Preventing Corruption in Security Budgeting without Jeopardizing National Security'.

And just about a year ago, the third in the Series which was held on May 4, 2021 had robust discussions on 'Corruption and Cost of Governance in Nigeria'. You will agree with me that all these four chosen themes so far are very germane in the fight against corruption and more importantly they contribute towards the attainment of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS) one of whose objectives is promoting an improved legal, policy, and regulatory environment for the fight against corruption. It is therefore very heartwarming for me and the entire Commission, that you have created the time out of your busy schedules to be part of this important discussion today. ICPC greatly appreciates this sacrifice.

We are happy that this particular Policy Dialogue is the first to be organized on a full in-person participation with a Virtual platform as a complementary component. This time last year when the coronavirus (COVID-19) was still ravaging the entire world, the Dialogue was held mainly as a Virtual event with restricted in-person participation limited to key speakers only. The fact that we are all gathered here today is heartwarming and symbolizes the

collective success in the fight against COVID-19 in our country and the world over. Although the war is not yet totally over and we are not to let down our guard, there is room for cautious optimism that the pandemic is receding into an epidemic which will ultimately be conquered. It is our collective hope that the retreating trend would continue to allow full national activities to be returned to their normal pre-pandemic state.

This Policy Dialogue and its concomitant Policy Brief were designed to be part of our key performance indicators in pursuit of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS), 2017-2021 of the Federal Government of Nigeria, as well as the Policies, Programmes and Projects Audit Committee (PPPAC) Roadmap (2019-2023) adopted by the government at the commencement of its second term in 2019. These twin documents (NACS & PPPAC) require that stakeholders are made part of the ICPC activities in order to achieve one of its objectives stated earlier.

Our Policy Dialogues generally are meant to deliberate on issues that focus on more systemic and institutional improvements, which also should be sustainable regardless of changes in political administration. And the concomitant Policy Brief is meant to offer solutions that are practicable and directly relevant to the improvement of the subject matter of the policy.

The timing of this Policy Dialogue on *Entrenching Transparency in Public Service Recruitment Process in Nigeria* could not have come at a better time than now. This is because there is near consensus across our country and across all political divides that there is a lack of transparency in public service recruitment process across all tiers of government in our country. This is regardless of which political party holds the reign of power in these three tiers of government (federal, state and local).

Indiscriminate recruitment has impacted personnel budget such that government personnel wage bill has continued to rise geometrically almost doubling between 2015 and 2022 from N1.832trn in 2015 to N3.494trn in 2022. To underscore the corruption prevalent in the process, ICPC has received and is investigating almost 100 petitions on recruitment scam from victim institutions and complicit individuals. The situation festers due to lack of transparency. There is also the associated problem of fake certificates that dog the process thus compounding a bad situation now made worse.

Lack of transparency in the recruitment process has been subject of discussions not only in the various mass media organs but also very vociferously in the legislative arms of government across levels. Some members of the executive arm of government have equally voiced their concerns on the matter. In actual fact, many Nigerians in both official and non-official quarters have expressed serious concerns over the growing patronage system in the public sector. For example, the Executive Governor of Borno State His Excellency Professor Babagana Zulum raised a serious concern that these days the recruitment into the Security Agencies (Nigerian Army, Police and others) has been politicized. And according to him, the governors, ministers and other top government functionaries have recruitment slots who are not ***interviewed whether they are qualified or not.***

It does appear to us that the meritocratic tradition in the public service which existed to some degree up to the 80s in our country is gradually disappearing with very few islands of recruitment integrity only remaining. This is a matter of grave concern that needs to be critically, objectively and robustly discussed in this particular Dialogue Session.

The expectation here is that this Policy Dialogue session made up of experienced, knowledgeable and diverse stakeholder groups across official and non-official divide would offer a more dispassionate look at this problem which is almost becoming endemic. This endemic feature is not surprising because its driving forces include desperation for stable employment that the public service offers, the abject lack of scrutiny and laxity of the public service employment process, endemic perception of commercialization of service delivery by graft and gratification and systemic **corruption.**

It is on the basis of this therefore that I am highly delighted to welcome all of you once again to this very important Policy Dialogue session. It is my hope that you all would be able to stay to the end of this discussion session as we value your great presence. On our part, we will try to keep the period within tolerable time limit.

Thank you for your attention.