



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

**Remarks at commissioning of the Judicial Research Center at FCT High Court
On 11 March 2010**

By

Ms. Dagmar Thomas

The Representative, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Nigeria,

The Chief Judge of the Federal Capital Territory,
Hon Justice L. H. Gummi

Other Protocols:

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has been supporting the development and implementation of good practices in judicial reform in Nigeria since 2001. The overall objective of the ongoing judicial component of the European Union funded project, "Support to the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and the Nigerian Judiciary" is to strengthen judicial integrity and capacity at both federal and state levels. Within this broad framework, one of the immediate objectives of the project is to enhance the timeliness and quality of justice delivery, strengthen the professional capacity of prosecutors and judges in the handling of corruption related cases and ensure the availability of resources and materials which are needed for the enhanced performance of their duties. In this context, the Judicial Research Centers are being established to improve the capacity and output of judicial officers to ensure faster dispensation of cases and reduce the backlog of cases in the courts.

Our work with the FCT judiciary took a new dimension in 2007 when justice sector stakeholders assembled at an integrity meeting to forge a comprehensive and ambitious plan of action to improve access to justice, increase timeliness and quality of justice delivery, enhance the integrity,

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accountability and transparency of the courts, and strengthen coordination and cooperation across the justice sector institutions. The Chief Judge of the FCT judiciary immediately set up five committees to implement this action plan. We are encouraged by the progress made so far by the judiciary which is evident from their support to the establishment of this centre.

The same year, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Legal Defence and Assistance Project (LEDAP) carried out an assessment of the integrity and capacity of the justice sector in ten states including the Federal Capital Territory. It was found that court users considered the FCT courts more accessible than is the case in many of the other pilot states while lawyers, users and judges agreed that timeliness had improved significantly. It was also found that the FCT courts enjoy a relatively high level of public trust with users indicating that they will use the courts again based on their experience. However the study found that productivity of FCT judges in comparison with their colleagues in other jurisdictions left some room for improvement. Since then however, much has happened under the leadership of Honourable Justice L.H. Gummi, OFR, Chief Judge of the Federal Capital Territory. The judiciary in partnership with the other justice sector stakeholders has introduced bold reforms which include:

1. Designation of special courts with criminal jurisdiction to handle ICPC and EFCC cases.
2. The enactment of the High Court Civil procedure rules and the Magistrate Court rules which has reduced the delays in the filing and determination of civil cases.
3. The establishment of the Multi- door Court House for Alternative Dispute Resolution. This has led to the diversion of many small claims or minor civil disputes from the mainstream courts to alternative dispute resolution methods.
4. Provision of computers to all high court judges, magistrates and management staff.

5. The introduction of automation of court proceedings and fast track courts.
6. Hosting of a Town Hall Meeting for over 400 justice sector stakeholders and court users in the FCT High Court.
7. Ongoing process of the computerisation of the court registry which is the engine room of the judiciary.
8. Establishment of a Bar Bench forum to discuss and find ways of improving the administration of justice.

These are just some of the achievements which should be seen as a source of inspiration for the members of the various committees who work relentlessly towards the implementation of the FCT action plan. At the same time the progress made should give the users of the courts the confidence that the judiciary is ready to be accountable for their own ambitious commitments, as stated in the action plan.

* The commissioning of this JRC today is yet another landmark event in the history of the FCT judiciary towards improving justice delivery for the benefit of citizens. It is a good example of the enduring partnership between the European Union, UNODC and the Nigerian Government. It is hoped that such cooperation and its outcome will lead to greater support by the government to the implementation of the action plans drawn up by pilot states. UNODC on its part will continue to work with those who show commitment to the work we are doing in Nigeria. At this point I will like to acknowledge the presence of Hon Justice Kate Abiri, the Chief Judge of Bayelsa state, and welcome them as the 11th state of the judicial integrity programme in Nigeria.]

Thank you very much.