

Tinubu's ICPC Probe on PFIPC is a Political Smokescreen to Bury the Truth, Says HURIWA

The Human Rights Writers Association of Nigeria (HURIWA) has described President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's directive to the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) to investigate the controversial Presidential Foreign Intervention Promotion Council (PFIPC) as a carefully choreographed political drama aimed at managing public outrage rather than uncovering the whole truth. The association said the investigation has been stripped of every appearance of independence because President Tinubu had, even before the commencement of any investigation, publicly dismissed allegations against his Chief of Staff, Femi Gbajabiamila, thereby creating the unmistakable impression that certain individuals have already been cleared before any evidence is examined. "This is not how a credible democracy functions. It is not how an independent anti-corruption investigation begins. When the President appears to have reached a conclusion before investigators even commence their work, the outcome becomes predictable in the eyes of Nigerians."

HURIWA stressed that it is not declaring Mr. Gbajabiamila guilty of any offence, but noted that the Chief of Staff remains one of the persons publicly accused by the principal actor in the PFIPC controversy. According to the association, those allegations deserve a thorough, impartial and evidence-based investigation instead of political pronouncements that appear to prejudice the issues. "What Nigerians are witnessing is beginning to look less like an anti-corruption investigation and more like an elaborate public relations exercise designed to protect the image of the Presidency while sacrificing only those who lack political protection." The association argued that the Presidency cannot simultaneously proclaim its commitment to transparency while appearing to shield powerful officials from scrutiny. "If allegations are frivolous, let investigators establish that through evidence. If they are false, let the courts pronounce them false. But now Mr. President has assumed the role of investigator, prosecutor and judge by politically absolving key figures before the investigative process even begins."

HURIWA warned that the 30-day deadline handed to the ICPC risks creating public suspicion that the exercise is intended to produce a politically convenient report rather than an exhaustive investigation into how a non-existent agency allegedly operated openly, claimed presidential backing, reportedly sought official recognition, allegedly interacted with government institutions and financial establishments, and generated national controversy without earlier detection.

The rights group described as astonishing the suggestion that attention should be focused almost exclusively on the alleged impersonator while insufficient attention is paid to determining whether any public officials, insiders or influential actors may have knowingly or unknowingly facilitated the activities now under investigation. "The fundamental question Nigerians are asking is simple: How could a supposedly fictitious agency allegedly function, circulate documents, seek official recognition, engage institutions and generate such nationwide controversy without systemic failures or possible complicity? These are the questions a genuine investigation must answer."

HURIWA maintained that the only institution capable of impartially determining the veracity of all allegations remains the court of law, where every party will have the opportunity to present evidence under judicial scrutiny. "The ICPC must not allow itself to become a vehicle for legitimizing conclusions that many Nigerians believe were announced even before investigations commenced. Its constitutional responsibility is to investigate every allegation fearlessly, irrespective of the status, office or political influence of those involved."

The prominent Pro-democracy and civil rights advocacy group HUMAN RIGHTS WRITERS ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA (HURIWA) cautioned that any investigation perceived as selective, sanitized or politically managed would inflict lasting damage on the credibility of Nigeria's anti-corruption architecture and reinforce public cynicism about the unequal application of justice. "No democracy survives when justice appears selective. No anti-corruption agency retains public confidence when powerful individuals appear insulated from scrutiny while others are speedily prosecuted. Nigerians deserve the whole truth—not a carefully scripted narrative."

HURIWA therefore demanded that every individual whose name has surfaced in connection with the PFIPC controversy be subjected to the same level of independent scrutiny, without exception or preferential treatment, and urged the ICPC to allow evidence—not political considerations—to determine its findings. "The rule of law demands equal accountability. The Presidency must resist every temptation to influence, directly or indirectly, the course of this investigation. Anything short of a genuinely independent probe will remain, in the eyes of Nigerians, nothing more than a political smokescreen, a choreographed charade designed to bury uncomfortable questions instead of confronting them."