

HURIWA Rejects Army's claims of poor funding as a performance hindrance

The Human Rights Writers Association of Nigeria (HURIWA) has strongly challenged recent statements made by the Chief of Army Staff (COAS); Lieutenant General Taoreed Abiodun Lagbaja, attributing the Nigerian Army's substandard performance to poor funding. HURIWA described these claims as unfounded, asserting that the defense sector has consistently received the lion's share of Nigeria's national budget for several years, debunking the notion that the military is starved of funds. In a press statement issued recently, HURIWA stated that data from the Budget Office of the Federation indicates a steady increase in defense allocations from 2015 to 2024, encompassing the administrations of both President Muhammadu Buhari and the current President Bola Ahmed Tinubu. This data contradicts the Army leadership's claims of underfunding. "In 2016, under Buhari's administration, the Ministry of Defence received a total budget of N443.1 billion, with N130.80 billion allocated specifically for capital expenditure. This figure rose to N465.40 billion in 2017, with N140 billion earmarked for capital expenditure, while recurrent expenses covered the remainder. The following year, the ministry was allocated N576.31 billion, with N157.71 billion devoted to capital projects.



"In 2019, the budget further increased to N589.9 billion, with additional allocations directed towards the military's ongoing operation in the North-East, 'Operation Lafiya Dole' (now Operation Hadin Kai). That year alone, the military operation received N75 billion, while N159.10 billion was allocated for capital projects within the defense sector. "As Nigeria faced escalating security threats, the budget for the defense sector saw a significant increase, soaring to N900 billion in 2020, with N116 billion allocated for capital expenditure and a staggering N784.6 billion for recurrent expenses. By 2021, the Ministry of Defence received N772.60 billion, with N127.80 billion allocated for capital expenditure.

"In 2022, the defense budget rose to an unprecedented N1.2 trillion, followed by another increase to N1.248 trillion in 2023, with N204.60 billion and N156.20 billion allocated for capital projects in those years, respectively. In 2024, under President Tinubu, the budget continues its upward trajectory, with N1.647 trillion allocated to defense, accounting for 5.7% of the entire national budget," HURIWA stated. Furthermore, HURIWA noted that the government has frequently supplemented the defense budget with

additional allocations, particularly for military hardware procurement. For example, in 2018, President Buhari authorized the withdrawal of \$1 billion from the Excess Crude Account, part of which was used to procure 12 Tucano fighter jets valued at \$496 million. In 2021, an N982.72 billion supplementary budget was passed for military equipment and platforms, reinforcing the Army's operational capabilities.

Despite these substantial financial commitments, HURIWA argued that the Army's poor performance is not due to a lack of funding but stems from deeper institutional issues. The organization pointed to a culture of corruption, lack of transparency, and mismanagement of resources within the Army. HURIWA frowned that significant portions of soldiers' allowances are allegedly embezzled by senior officers and highlighted reported inefficiencies in handling military expenditures. The advocacy group further asserted that the

Nigerian Army suffers from a lack of discipline and professionalism. They noted several reported instances of human rights abuses by soldiers, undermining public trust in the military, and cited allegations that some disloyal elements within the Army have been collaborating with terrorists, bandits, and kidnappers, compromising national security efforts.

HURIWA contended that without addressing these systemic issues, even unlimited funding would fail to resolve the challenges facing the Nigerian Army. "The problems facing the Nigerian Army are not financial but institutional," HURIWA stated, emphasizing the need for reforms in professionalism, accountability, and transparency for the Army to function effectively. In light of these realities, HURIWA called for immediate structural reforms within the Nigerian Army to restore efficiency and integrity. The group also urged greater accountability in the management of defense budgets, stressing the importance of proper utilization of funds allocated for military operations and capital projects. "Opening the vaults of the Central Bank of Nigeria to the Army would not make a difference unless these internal issues are tackled head-on," HURIWA asserted.

HURIWA concluded by urging the federal government to review the operations and leadership structure of the Nigerian Army, ensuring that officers involved in corruption or collusion with criminal elements are brought to justice. "As Nigeria continues to face growing security threats, the need for a professional and accountable military has never been more urgent," HURIWA concluded.