

**OPENING REMARKS BY THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, RT. HON. FEMI GBAJABIAMILA AT THE ONE-DAY PUBLIC HEARING ORGANISED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES' COMMITTEE ON POLICE AFFAIRS ON REPOSITIONING THE NIGERIAN POLICE FOR ENHANCED SERVICE DELIVERY. TUESDAY, 25<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2020.**

**PROTOCOLS**

More than any other institution of the State, it is the police force that relates to the citizens daily. In many communities across Nigeria, the Police Force is the only representative of the Nigerian state, and the connection between our citizens and the state is often defined by their interactions with the Nigerian Police. It is unfortunate and entirely unacceptable., that the relationship between the police and many of these communities is now defined by fear, mutual antagonism and an absolute loss of faith in the ability of the police to protect and to serve.

In the last few days, we have all witnessed as the city of Sagamu in Ogun State has been unsettled by an orgy of violence resulting from the extrajudicial killing of a young footballer by officers of the Nigerian Police. Citizens who gathered to protest this killing were soon themselves at the receiving end of police bullets. This is not an isolated incident. We are daily inundated with news reports of

interactions between citizens and the police resulting in the injury and death of those citizens. Reports of police harassment of young people have become so rampant that they barely even break through the news cycle except when public anger becomes so great that it results in a breakdown of law and order.

We can no longer stand for this, and we will not. This House of Representatives has a responsibility to speak for our citizens and we will continue to do so even when it is inconvenient.

The first responsibility of the state to its citizens is to protect life and property. Everything else flows from this fundamental obligation. When the agencies we rely on to serve this purpose become predatory, they lose the faith of the public and become incapable of delivering on this responsibility. When the public are as afraid of the police as they are of the criminals, and perhaps even more so, the very fundamentals of our nationhood are at stake. We are confronted with an urgent need, deserving of our utmost attention and dedication. We must fix the Nigerian Police, restore public confidence and make the institution once more deserving of the true faith and support of the Nigerian people.

This public hearing has been convened to examine the ways we in the House of Representatives can act to improve the capacity of the Nigerian Police to deliver on its obligations to our people. We cannot do that job effectively if we do not

first allow for an honest assessment of our current reality. We will not achieve much of substance if we shy away from confronting the failures of recruitment and training, remuneration and welfare, responsibility and accountability that have left us with a national police force that is too often unfit for purpose.

Mr Chairman, as you and this Committee carry out this important assignment, I encourage you to seek out and listen to as many voices as possible. Engage with the officers and men of the Police, reject misinformation. Document the stories of our people, consider their expectations. Let the work you do demonstrate that this House of Representatives is fully capable of reflecting the most urgent concerns of the Nigerian people and acting in their best interests. I am confident that you will act judiciously and produce for the consideration of the House of Representatives, a quality report we can implement expeditiously.

I thank you all who have joined us here this morning. I welcome you all to the House of Representatives and I declare this public hearing open.

God bless you. God bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria.