

**LEAD DEBATE ON A BILL TO RECOGNIZE AND PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS  
AND ENHANCE THE CAPACITY OF THE GOVERNMENT**

**NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS PROTECTION BILL**

**Mr. Speaker, Honourable Colleagues,**

The National Human Rights Defenders Protection Bill (HB 1876), a piece of legislation that seeks to enshrine the rights and protections of those who dedicate their lives to defending the fundamental freedoms of all citizens.

The significance of human rights defenders cannot be overstated. They are at the forefront of the struggle against injustice, holding the government and private entities accountable, advocating for the marginalized, and ensuring that the principles enshrined in our Constitution and international agreements are upheld. However, despite their noble efforts, many human rights defenders in Nigeria face harassment, intimidation, and violence simply for standing up for justice and equality.

Unfortunately, many of these brave individuals face threats, harassment, violence, and even death. This Bill seeks to ensure that Nigeria upholds its duty to protect these defenders and foster an environment where they can work safely.

This Bill, therefore, aims to provide a comprehensive legal framework to recognize and protect human rights defenders. It guarantees their right to work without fear, to access information, to form organizations, to receive funding, and to communicate freely with both national and international human rights bodies. Furthermore, it ensures that no person shall be subjected to intimidation, reprisal, defamation, or any form of discrimination because of their human rights activities.

The Bill aligns with international human rights standards and underscores Nigeria's commitment to the protection of fundamental freedoms.

**Objectives of the Bill**

1. To ensure that the rights and freedoms in Part II of this Act are effectively protected and upheld.

2. To provide unhindered access to places, information, and resources necessary for human rights work.
3. To criminalize acts of intimidation and retaliation against human rights defenders.
4. To mandate public authorities to provide free access to human rights-related information.
5. To establish a dedicated Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders through the National Human Rights Commission.
6. To provide effective legal remedies and full reparation for any violations suffered by human rights defenders.

#### **Key Provisions:**

1. **Recognition and Protection of Human Rights Defenders:** The Bill establishes legal recognition of human rights defenders and guarantees their right to advocate for human rights without fear of intimidation or harm.

2. **Rights of Human Rights Defenders:**

Under the Bill, the rights of Human Rights Defenders include:

- Right to form and join associations.
- Right to solicit, receive, and utilize resources.
- Right to seek, receive, and disseminate information.
- Right to advocate and develop human rights principles.
- Right to communicate with national and international human rights bodies.
- Right to participate in public affairs and freedom of assembly.
- Right to privacy and freedom from intimidation, defamation, and reprisal.

3. **Obligations of the State and Non-State Actors:**

The Bill ensures that:

- The state take measures to ensure the safety and security of human rights defenders.

- Non-state actors do not engage in acts of intimidation, violence, or discrimination against human rights defenders.

#### 4. Remedies and Enforcement Mechanisms:

This Bill

- Provides for the establishment of a legal framework for addressing violations against human rights defenders.
- Provides for effective remedies and mandates prompt, independent investigations into violations against human rights defenders and guarantees full reparations to victims.
- Provides mechanisms for lodging complaints and seeking judicial intervention.
- Establishes the National Human Rights Commission as the dedicated body responsible for monitoring, supporting, and protecting human rights defenders.

**Mr. Speaker, Honourable Colleagues,**

The passage of this Bill is not only a legal necessity but also a moral obligation. By enacting this law, Nigeria will join the ranks of progressive nations that value and protect human rights defenders, enhance Nigeria's credibility on the global stage as a nation that values and upholds human rights, and sends a strong message that Nigeria stands firm in upholding human dignity, democracy, and the rule of law.

I, therefore, urge my colleagues to support this Bill, ensuring that those who defend our rights are themselves protected.

I so move.